# NUMBER 91

## A BELFAST GHOST STORY

by john skillen

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## Chapter 1 Friday 2nd June

We lived in 91 Beechmount for about four years before being driven from the house. There were seven of us: me, my wife Greta, and our children. John, our oldest, was 16 when the occurrences started. Mark was the second child, at fifteen. Paul was next and the two youngest were Gerard and Joanne. Greta and I had been married for seventeen years.

The house itself was just like any other house, a terrace council house with four bedrooms, two of them downstairs. It had a bathroom and separate WC upstairs and a large back garden with a few apple trees. We didn't have a front garden, and so the front door opened out right onto the street. The house was probably built around 1972. We had met the previous tenants because our previous house was only about 50 yards away. We lived in that house for ten years until the advent of our daughter, Joanne, made us realise that she would need a bedroom of her own. I'm telling you this to let you know that what descended on us came straight out of the blue. As far as we were concerned, the house had no history of anything odd happening in it. The previous tenants were people well known to us – they were nice people, certainly not the sort to have given the house any kind of a weird history. The house was set in a sort of cul-de-sac, faced by a large square. There wasn't much through traffic, so it was ideal for the kids to play in.

Things had been happening in our home for almost two years, but we had

never paid much attention to them.

Things such as the lights and television going on and off by themselves, footsteps heard by my son John on the landing in the dead of night, or the shadows that my wife and I had seen passing certain doorways both upstairs and downstairs. The first we had always put down to faulty sockets or something of that nature. The second was easily explained away as the house settling down for the night. The last was ignored as just our imaginations or a trick of the eye.

Things took a frightening twist on the 2nd of June 1989. It was a Friday – one we shall never forget. It was the feast of the Sacred Heart and we decided that we should go to Mass in the evening. We had been going to Mass regularly every Sunday for at least a year, and we had even started to pray for an hour every Wednesday at the Chapel of Adoration.

Later on we decided to get in a few cans of beer for Greta and myself. We also chose some video tapes – family viewing that we could all enjoy. The night went well. The kids enjoyed the tapes and around 11.30 they began to get ready for bed. They were all settled by midnight – not sleeping perhaps, but quiet. It was a normal evening. There was no atmosphere to suggest what was to happen. Nothing seemed amiss. But I was soon to step into a waking nightmare, a living hell that would haunt me and my family for months to come.

Around 12.30, by now feeling somewhat sleepy, I went upstairs to go to the bathroom. After I was finished there, I was on my way downstairs when suddenly what seemed to be a lady appeared at the end of the landing. I was quite taken aback, and although I immediately assumed that my tiredness must have made my eyes play tricks with the light coming from the bathroom and the shadows in the landing, there was nevertheless something almost real and three-dimensional about this 'person'. In my confusion I didn't quite know what to make of it all. But there was one thing I felt instinctively – this 'person', or whatever it was, wasn't welcome. Strangely, although I was disturbed, I was not unduly frightened. I must be seeing things, I told myself firmly. The best course of action,

I thought, was to ignore it, then it might just go away. I preferred the thought of having an hallucination to any kind of supernatural explanation.

I hurried down the stairs. Not a retreat, just a strategic withdrawal. I made no mention of it to Greta in order not to alarm her. Greta and I sat talking for a while, and then I went upstairs again to check the taps in the bathroom. I did this most nights after the kids had washed at bedtime since they had a habit of leaving the taps trickling. By this time, I had dismissed what I had seen earlier. It had been put out of my mind by the relaxed conversation with Greta. It had been an hallucination, a trick of the light on my tired eyes, so the glimpse of the woman wasn't even in my thoughts.

As I checked the taps of the wash hand basin, I was startled when the door slammed behind me. It wasn't a windy night so it wasn't a stray gust of wind. Then the light went out. It happened so quickly that I didn't have time to react. Then the light went on again. Off again. While the lights were going on and off, something else was happening – the room was getting very cold.

I stood for a few seconds, not knowing what to do. What was going on? I could feel some kind of presence – an experience I'd never felt before. Every sense in my body told me that there was somebody else with me in the bathroom – every sense, that is, except the sense of sight. There was nobody there. I could see my own breath in the freezing atmosphere. Small as the bathroom was, I got the sensation that something was prowling around me, only inches away. I was shivering violently by now. It was too much for me. Terrified, I began shouting for help. It didn't even occur to me to try opening the door. The hair on the back of my neck was standing up – I was past helping myself.

Then, over my own noise, I could hear John on the landing outside. He was shouting through the door that he was pushing and pulling at it, but he couldn't get it to move. John is tall and very strong, but his strength was useless. Suddenly, the door opened by itself. John was on the other side, tousled from sleep, complaining about the noise I'd made and how it had wakened him up.

I was in such a panic I ran straight out of the bathroom and into the boys' room. Greta had heard the commotion and was on her way up the stairs when I burst out of the bathroom. The other boys had been wakened by now. I could feel their eyes on me. They didn't know what was happening, but from the look on my face they knew that *something* was wrong.

Greta saw the state I was in and stopped in surprise halfway along the landing. 'What is it!' she shouted in alarm. 'What's going on – ?' She stopped. A look passed over her face as she felt the presence of something very strange. For a few moments she froze in place, unable to move. The kids had all wakened by this stage, and they looked on as we all felt a strange chill sweep through the upstairs of the house. Then Greta broke from her shock and ran into the room with the rest of us. She grabbed my arm and squeezed it. She was badly frightened.

'There's something out there!' she whispered. 'I felt it pass me on the landing!'

What could I do? There was something very strange going on in my home and I didn't know how to cope with it. It was now the early hours of the morning; we had no phone so we couldn't ring up anyone for help or advice – though who we could have rung was beyond me; we didn't have a car so we couldn't just pack up the kids and drive them away to safety. It occurred to me to try knocking on my neighbours's doors – but what could I possibly say to them? If I told them my house was haunted, they'd only think I was going mad. How could I explain what I had gone through?

I also had to think of Greta and the kids. If I did rush them out of the house, then that would only disturb and frighten them all the more. And, after all, I didn't know what was actually happening myself.

By now the kids were too upset to stay upstairs – even with Greta and I there to soothe and calm them. We decided to take them down to the living room. I knew that there would be very little sleep in the house that night, but I had to try and get the kids settled down some way. They were

sitting around the living room, just staring at each other. I told them to try and relax and Greta suggested that we prepare makeshift beds for them – just a few cushions on the floor. Eventually the kids agreed to try and quieten down. Greta and I made up a bed for ourselves beside the fireplace. We sat on the floor, still in a state of shock. The kids were watching us closely, so I nudged Greta and we lay down to encourage the kids to do the same. I was just lying there, staring up at the ceiling, the events of earlier going through my mind, then, suddenly –

Something grabbed my head and shoulders and flung me against the side of the fireplace. My head struck something very hard and for a few seconds I was so stunned I couldn't see anything. Although I was confused, I knew that *something* had grabbed me – it had seized me between the shoulder and the neck. Then another realisation sank home. Whatever was going on, I was the one who was being singled out for special attention.

The kids woke up again and started screaming. Greta jumped up in a panic. I was too dazed to do anything other than lie there and wonder what was happening. I turned on the lights and tried to calm down Greta and the kids. That put them in an even worse state. With the lights on we saw that our breaths were visible. The temperature had dropped and the room was freezing. This was beginning to be just too much for me. How much more would we have to take?

My first impression of it being an hallucination now proved to be little more than wishful thinking. Physical things such as these attacks and this drop in temperature could mean only one thing. There was some sort of supernatural presence. But I didn't *want* to believe that. This was my house, the centre of my family, the focus of my life. I couldn't face up to a supernatural entity playing havoc with the people who meant more than the world to me. It was the isolation that got to me the most. How do you go about dealing with a problem of this sort? If you go to a doctor, he's likely to think you mad. Most people have no time for the supernatural – it's fine on TV or in a film, but in real life? No way.

Suddenly the woman appeared in front of me. I could see her very clearly, it was frightening. She stood there, staring at me with very piercing eyes. She was of medium height, with dark hair held in a sort of bun at the side of her head. Her dress was black and full length reaching to the floor. The blackness of her dress contrasted strongly with her pale face, which looked to be an almost pure white.

I shouted to Greta to help me. The woman started to walk towards me. I was frozen in place. I broke into a cold sweat, trembling all over. Then she put her hand on my shoulder. That was the worst part of that whole experience. I had no shirt on and her hand felt like a lump of ice. I thought I was going to pass out, but then Greta reached me. She grabbed my hands, pulled me over to her and put her arms around me. The woman in black walked out through the living room door and up the stairs.

I could only sit there in a state of shattered nerves. Then I realised that Greta still had her arms around me. She was sobbing into my chest. The kids were all screaming and shouting, and I knew I had to pull myself together. I had to try to act normally. My first priority was to ensure that the children felt safe.

We had a downstairs bedroom with a door which could be locked, so I asked the kids if it would make them feel any safer if they were put in here. The thought of the lock reassured them, so we put them all into our bed, hoping that at last they might get some sleep. Greta and I got a mattress and laid it on the floor beside the bed. Once again we all settled down to sleep.

After a few minutes I could hear by the rhythm of the breathing around me that the children were falling asleep. Then I felt my hair being tugged. Despite the pain, I managed not to jump and waken everybody again. The hair tugging continued until whatever it was seemed to realise it would get no satisfaction from me. I was slapped across the face a few times. I lay there, terrified. I couldn't see anything, but I felt something very strongly.

I was too nervous to sleep, and as I lay there, I remembered that we had left the lights on in the living room. I've always been very careful when

it comes to anything electrical, so I said to Greta that I wanted to go in and turn them off.

Mark, my son, overheard me, and said that he wanted to come in with me. I said he could come, so we both rose and made our way into the living room. I wasn't surprised that Mark wanted to come with me. He was my second eldest and while he was of medium height he had a sturdy build. He was the type not to be bothered by anything, a fearless sort, even before all our trouble started. I could tell that it wouldn't faze him to return to the room where the attack had happened. His fearlessness was a comfort to me, so I said he could come along.

It was eerie to come back into the room, where the supernatural had so lately made its presence plain. I sat down on the sofa, overcome at what had started happening to us. Mark, meanwhile, started to turn off the lamps. Then I realised that there was somebody else in the room with us. At the other end of the sofa was the woman again. I couldn't move.

I called to Mark, 'Can you see anything on the sofa?' He stared at where the woman sat and said that he could see a sort of mist beside me.

I sat for a moment, wondering whether I should run or just sit tight, when all of a sudden she got up and walked towards the door. I got up to follow her in case she was going to go into the bedroom where Greta was, but when I got to the hall she was walking up the stairs just like a real, solid, normal person. I could see and hear her feet on the carpet and her hand was on the hand rail. She walked to the top of the stairs, reached the landing, and passed out of sight.

When Mark and I returned to the bedroom, I told Greta that everything was all right and that we should all try to get some sleep.

The woman in black appeared once more in the early hours of that morning. She stood beside my son Paul as he slept. Her presence so near to him and her obvious interest in him frightened me. Paul is a year younger than Mark, but as far as character and build go he is the complete opposite. He is slim with a nervous personality. I knew that if she were to touch him in anyway she could seriously affect him for the rest of his

life. I was worried in case she had some harm in store, but she made no move to touch him. After a while she walked out.

I spent the rest of the night nodding off and then starting up out of sleep. I was too afraid to sleep in case she returned with harmful intent.

## Chapter 2 Saturday 3rd June

When it was time to get up, nobody said very much. I noticed that Greta and the kids were all very jumpy. The kids couldn't get out quick enough. They got dressed, had a small breakfast and were away – and who could blame them? When they left, Greta and I talked it over and decided to keep it to ourselves. It was, after all, very hard to believe, and we had been the ones to experience it. What would those who hadn't been there make of it all? We would rather not find out the hard way.

But we hadn't allowed for the kids. They quickly told their friends, and word soon spread to the neighbours.

Before the morning was over, a few neighbours called into the house to ask about the events of the previous night. They found it very hard to believe, but I could see by their faces that our story frightened them. They accepted our story because they knew we weren't the type to imagine such things.

Later that day we sent around to our local church, St Paul's, for a priest to come and bless the house, to see if it would help at all. While we waited for the priest, we found ourselves on edge. A very strange atmosphere now existed in the house. It felt cold and dark. Just the day before everything had been normal, but now nothing felt quite right. We kept asking each other, 'Why us?'

My brother Bernard called in to the house that afternoon. I'm the youngest of four brothers, with Bernard the eldest. He was called Barney

for short. His son had just made his Holy Communion and it was a while before we could bring ourselves to tell him of our experiences. When we did eventually tell him, we could tell by his face that he was badly frightened. He left that day, never to set foot in that house again and I can't find it in my heart to blame him.

Around half past six that evening, the priest arrived to bless the house. He was short and stocky, with a round face. He was very smartly turned out, but he gave the appearance of not wanting to be in the house. I didn't know him personally because he was new to the parish. He came into the living room and I told him about our experience. He had no explanation for what might have happened and made no pretence about how effective he might be. He blessed the downstairs rooms and then it was time to go upstairs.

On his way up, he paused on the third stair and made no move to go any higher. Instead he just threw the holy water up over the bannisters. I could tell by this and the speed with which he vanished out the front door that he was scared. I had no confidence in him, but the kids seemed happy enough so I didn't say anything that might worry them.

Later that evening, a cousin of mine, Ta O'Dwyer, invited Greta and myself over to his place for the evening. Ta's mother and my grandmother were sisters who always kept up a close companionship. Ta has always had a great head of curly hair – a real mass of curls, it was – but now the years are starting to show and the curls are on either side of his head. He's well known all over town, for he always has a joke to tell and even if it's not always very funny, you have to laugh – he just has that sort of way with him. In a word, he's a real character. Ta's wife, Margaret, has the same sort of personality and she loves a good old-fashioned gossip. Greta and she are very close, more like sisters than just good friends.

I wasn't keen to go, for it meant leaving the kids on their own, but they seemed all right now. They had settled themselves and they even said to us: 'Go ahead and get out for an hour. Take your minds off things.' So we decided to go. It was just across the street so we knew we weren't far

if we were needed for any reason.

In Ta's house, we sat talking for a few hours. Naturally the topic of our house came up. Ta was very interested and told us to look after ourselves as we didn't know what was in the house.

When Greta and I left Ta's house about 11.30, Ta's son and his girlfriend came along with us. They were curious to learn if they could sense anything out of the ordinary in the house.

When we got in, we found the kids in fine fettle. They were all content and we sat talking to them and our two visitors. I felt hopeful. It looked as if things might be getting back to normal.

During the course of the visit, I went to the bathroom. Despite what had already happened in the house, I didn't have anything on my mind. Suddenly a strange feeling come over me. It started to get very cold and goose pimples came up all over me.

The woman in black was there. She said, 'Get out, get out!' I didn't know if she meant out of the house or out of the bathroom, but to my horror she was standing in front of me.

I ran out of the bathroom, but to get down the stairs I had to pass her on the landing. Whether it was my fear that paralysed me or whether it was her power – I don't know, but I couldn't bring myself to go past her. I just stood there in a daze.

She, meanwhile, had me transfixed with her piercing gaze. It was a sight that I shall never forget. The expression on her face terrified me. I knew from that expression that her intentions were not good.

Then I called for Greta. The thought of her gave me the courage to face this thing that was threatening to take over my home.

Greta and the others ran up the stairs. I reached out and grabbed Greta's hand and something told me to start praying. I knelt down at the end of the landing. Greta joined me and together we prayed aloud.

Greta had her rosary beads in her hand, and we both clung to them. But there was a third hand on the beads. The woman in black had come between us, her hand stretched out and on the beads to keep us apart.

I was very concerned for Greta's safety. So far this thing had been paying all of its attentions to me. But I wasn't to know that it might turn on another member of the family.

It was all very weird. I could see the woman, but Greta couldn't, although she said she could feel her presence. Somebody from downstairs handed us a bottle of holy water. I unscrewed the cap and got ready to pour it over this thing.

The woman in black could see what was happening. She could sense that the holy water was a threat to her. She looked down at me with an expression of pure anger. It really frightened me, but I went ahead and poured it over her.

I saw the water splashing over her head, and trickling down her face, but no one else could see her getting this soaking. Nothing happened for a moment or two, but then she vanished as completely and as quickly as she had first appeared.

For a few minutes, we stayed at the top of the stairs, trying to explain what had happened. People said to me that they'd seen me pour the holy water, but they couldn't see where it was going. Another phenomenon they experienced was the intense cold we had encountered from the night before.

One thing convinced me of my sanity. It was a little thing, but it was proof to me that this nightmare was really, physically happening.

I felt the carpet at the top of the stairs, where the woman had been standing. It was dry.

Later on, after our visitors left, another neighbour called to see how we were keeping. Cathy was a friend of Greta's, but I had known her from my childhood, for we had grown up in the same area. Cathy is tall with dark hair and, while she is one of those people who always seem to have problems, she is a very sincere person. She's good-living and very quick to help in a time of need. She loves her bingo and she's always on the go. She had heard about the things that had been happening. She was

concerned about us and stayed to talk, speculating on what it could mean.

While we were talking, I felt very jumpy. It was getting cold again. Somehow – I don't know how – I knew that the woman in black was coming down the stairs. It was an unbelievable sensation. I didn't know what to expect. Thinking of what I had done to her earlier, I hoped she wasn't coming back for revenge.

Then, there she was. She stood and looked at me for a few seconds, then came closer and tried to sit beside me on the sofa.

I said to Cathy and Greta, 'Move up and make room for her.' They could tell from the look of frozen horror on my face just who I meant by *her*. When she sat down beside me, it was as if a real person of flesh and blood and human substance sat there.

I felt her leg against mine, I felt her shoulder rubbing up against my shoulder. I couldn't move. All my muscles had turned to water. I wanted to turn and look at her face to face, but my neck wouldn't move. All I could do was look at her out of the corner of my eye. I sat there trembling. I could feel myself actually shaking and my heart was beating like mad. A terrible coldness emanated from her

Cathy tried to talk to her. She couldn't see her, but she could feel her cold presence sitting there. When the woman made no answer to Cathy's questions, Cathy asked me to try and get through to her since I was the one who could see her.

Cathy suggested that I should ask her first of all: 'Are you a lost soul?'

The woman stared at me, stern-faced, then she shook her head.

I told Cathy that the reply was no.

'Ask her if she needs prayers,' said Cathy. The reply was the same, another stern shake of the head.

I was feeling very uncomfortable and restless. The woman in black was losing her patience with me.

Then, out of the blue, Cathy started shouting at her, 'You're evil! What are you doing here, tormenting these people? They never did you any harm!'

This outburst angered the creature. She lunged at me and banged my head off the wall. All I could see were stars. I couldn't believe her strength. I was just like paper in her hands.

Cathy shouted, 'Go away and leave these people alone!'

The woman in black ignored her. She closed in on me, gripping my neck to give her a better purchase as she repeatedly banged my head off the wall. Her attack was like a fit. Her grip was so powerful and unexpected that I really thought I was going to die.

The only thing that stopped her was Greta. She grabbed me and held herself in front of me so that the woman couldn't get at me. The woman drew back, her hold on me broken for a moment, then she turned with a look of sheer rage on her face and stalked out of the living room and I was left almost unconscious.

We stayed up for the rest of that night, too frightened to think of sleeping. Thankfully, she didn't return.

## Chapter 3 Sunday 4th June

The situation had now taken a more frightening twist. Her resort to violence was so unpredictable and powerful that I thought my life was at risk. Apart from the actual pain she inflicted, each time I was in her grip, I was never sure when it would end.

The next day was Sunday, but we were so tired and worn out that we couldn't even begin to think of going to Mass. I wondered for a moment if this thing was winning by stopping us going to Mass, but I pushed that thought away. If I admitted that, then I was admitting that this was more than just an ordinary ghost or spirit. I couldn't face the thought of having to deal with something that was truly evil. Supernatural malice we could hope to face and win, but ultimate evil was slightly out of our league.

During that Sunday I was aware of Greta watching me. She was worried, I think, in case something should happen during the day. The woman had not made her presence felt during the hours of daylight, but there was now an air of gloom hanging over us. It was as if there had been a tragedy in the family. Despite being summer, the house was dark. This was a house that had once been filled with the sounds of happy family life: kids joking and laughing, or arguing over complaints that were forgotten about ten minutes later. The house was now a very dark, creepy place.

Everyone who came into the house was aware of this atmosphere. They all felt the same coldness and a sensation that someone was watching them. I could sense that she was indeed watching us. Although I never

saw her during the day, I did get strong feelings from time to time of her nearness. Her invisible, daytime presence was a reminder that she had made herself at home.

That afternoon my sister Mary called in, along with Chris, her husband. Mary is the second eldest of my five sisters, and she has always been a big sister to me. She's bossy but she has a kind heart, and I'm very fond of her. Chris is a very nervous sort of person and when he heard our story, he was petrified. Our lack of sleep was telling on us, and our appetites had diminished so that we were beginning to lose weight. When Mary noticed this, she said, 'Have you not thought of getting the house blessed?'

'We had a priest round from St Paul's,' I said, 'but he was no use. He was as scared as we were. He wouldn't even go right up the stairs to bless the top of the house. He just tossed his holy water up and ran.'

Mary clucked sympathetically. 'There's more than one priest in the world, y'know. If I were you I'd go to Clonard Monastery. There's a priest there called Fr Paddy O'Donnell. He's faced this sort of thing before.'

'Right enough,' I admitted. 'Now that you mention him, I know the name. He's some sort of expert, isn't he?' I looked at Greta. 'What do you think, love?'

'Anything's worth a try, John,' she said.

Mary stood up. 'Well, if you're going over to see him, sure Chris can take you over in the car.'

On the way over to Clonard, Mary kept watching me furtively. When I could stand it no longer, I said, 'What are you lookin' at me like that for?'

Mary was embarrassed. She didn't want to come right out and say what it was that was bothering her. Finally, when I pestered her, she admitted: 'It's your eyes, John. They look different. They're all sunken in to the sockets.'

'Well, what do you expect?' I said, 'I've hardly been getting any sleep the last few nights.'

I glanced over at Greta and was struck by the changes in her. Just a few

days before, she had been a happy-go-lucky person, very pleasant to be with, with a word for anyone who would stop and have the time to talk. Now, her complexion was grey from the strain. A stern quality made her look hurt. I felt very sorry for her.

Mary was still trying to work out what it was that she saw in my eyes. 'Almost as if...' she began. Her voice trailed off and I didn't press her to say any more. 'Almost as if they're haunted' was what she had been about to say.

When we reached Clonard, we were brought in to a waiting room while they paged Fr O'Donnell.

When the door opened after a longish wait, in walked a man who seemed to exude a warmth and humanity that was rare. You could feel the confidence of him, and his smile was real and friendly. He was very frail, of medium build. I shook his big, boney hand and was surprised at how cold it was. I immediately sensed a difference between this man and the priest from St Paul's – Fr O'Donnell certainly seemed to live a different kind of life. His clothes were neat and clean, but they were well-worn. After he introduced himself, he sat down and asked how he could help.

Greta and I poured our hearts out to him, relating everything that had happened to us from the Friday night until now. He listened to us with a very serious face, taking in everything, and when we were finished, he said:

'I find these things very hard to believe.' He held up his hand as he saw us start to object. He continued: 'But I can tell by the state you two are in that there is something in that house that is frightening you a lot.'

He scrutinised us for a moment and then nodded. 'Well, if it's what you want, I'll go over with you and bless the house, but before that I'd like to give you a blessing here, in the monastery. How do you feel about that?'

My first reaction was that I thought it peculiar that he couldn't believe our story. After all, as a priest, if he didn't believe in the supernatural, then who could? But when I thought it over, I realised that if Fr O'Donnell had

shown any signs of fear, then Greta and I might well have panicked. If he had shown excitement over my story, then it would have given the thing in my house more credibility, and with more credibility then it would have more power, and with more power it would have a greater hold over us.

Fr O'Donnell's advice was, 'If you do see something in the house, try to ignore it, otherwise you only add to its power.'

The blessing was frightening in itself. It was the sort of thing you would normally expect to only ever see in a film.

Fr O'Donnell wore some sort of religious regalia and he made me kneel in front of him. He put a little box with a relic in it against my forehead. Then he began to intone some powerful prayers which included phrases such as, 'driving out the devil', 'evil forces' and others I've forgotten. It was pretty hair-raising.

Then we went to bless the house.

All the way back to the house I kept praying. Although Fr O'Donnell carried himself with a great deal of confidence, second thoughts and doubts were beginning to occur to me. What if he started something that wouldn't stop? We had no idea what it was that he had to face. What if he started some sort of chain reaction that made things get out of hand? The other priest had been frightened by the atmosphere of the house – and he had only gone up three of the stairs. Here we had Fr O'Donnell who was about to give the whole house a thorough going-over. It's no wonder I was very edgy as we got closer to home.

When we arrived we found a few people had gathered at the corner. I found it embarrassing. I couldn't help imagining how people would be talking about me or discussing the 'thing' in my home. When we went inside, I was glad to get off the street.

Fr O'Donnell had brought some things along with him. His approach to the problem was quite different to the priest who had come out from St. Paul's. The priest from St Paul's had brought only a bottle of holy water with him.

Fr O'Donnell started his inspection in the living room and then went around the rest of the house. He asked me to go with him, praying as we went. In every room, Fr O'Donnell paused to pray while he sprinkled it with holy water.

I was heartened already. Fr O'Donnell made me feel relaxed and warm. I knew we would soon see the end of our troubles.

When he was finished, he stood in the hall and put his hand on my head. 'I don't think,' he said, 'that you'll have any more problems, but let me know how things get on.'

After he left, Greta and I had a talk. We asked each other how we felt now and we wondered aloud whether the blessing would help. Still, deep down inside, we both dreaded the coming of darkness.

Greta's nephew, Danny, called in. I always found Danny a quiet kid. When he was younger, Greta used to look after him – now he had grown up with the build of an athlete. He liked sports of every kind – which was just as well because he was going to need his running skills. Even before he was out of the hall, Greta started to tell him about our problem. No sooner had she started to talk, than Danny jumped backwards, right out into the street again – and that was before he had heard the full story. All the same, frightened though he was, Danny said that he and Sandra, his wife, would call that night and keep us company. Greta, I could see, was glad of that, and she seemed more settled. The incidents in the house so far had really unsettled her. The thought of us being alone in the house after dark filled her with dread.

When Danny and Sandra arrived, we sat talking. I hadn't had much chance to talk to Sandra since her marriage to Danny. Sandra is tall with long blonde hair and a bubbly, fun personality. After a while, Danny jumped up suddenly and said to Gerard and Joanne, our two youngest:

'I'm just going over to our house to check on wee Danny. D'you two want to come along and see him?'

I didn't know why he suddenly came out with this – we were all taken

aback by this sudden decision. But we weren't long in finding out. (Danny later told us he had felt a strange presence and something very cold coming down the stairs. He knew it would be better for the kids if they went out with him.)

No sooner had Danny left the house than *she* came in.

The black figure came towards me and I started to panic.

Sandra shouted, 'Remember what Fr O'Donnell said!' She meant that I should ignore it. I tried, but I couldn't tear my eyes from her face. She glared at me with real menace in her gaze. I knew I shouldn't look at her, but it was a fascination that I couldn't break. I wanted to break the lock she had on my eyes, but I couldn't.

Sandra shouted again, 'Don't look at it!'

Suddenly a glass on the table flew off and just missed Sandra's head – the woman's way of telling Sandra to shut up. Then the woman grabbed me and banged my head off the radiator a few times. Mark ran to my assistance, but he received a punch in the head that sent him flying. Greta and Sandra put their arms round me to keep the woman off. Only then did she turn and walk out of the room.

She was away for only a few minutes.

When she returned, she approached me once again. I jumped and ran for the front door out of pure fright because I knew what she was going to do. When I got to the door it wouldn't open. It was jammed solid. Sandra came up behind me and she tried her strength against it. It was a horrible feeling, for she had us trapped. A simple figure that appeared and disappeared would have been possible to put up with; but this was more than just a simple haunting of a house; this was a powerful entity who resented our presence.

After a few seconds the door opened and the three of us were able to get out into the street where we stood catching our breath for a few minutes. We peered back into the house, but there was no more activity. Luckily, the gathering of sightseers who had been there earlier had all drifted away.

I said at last, 'This thing isn't going to keep me out of my own home. I'm going back in.' Every fibre in my being shouted at me to turn and run, but my mind was made up. I was not going to let this thing take over my home.

When we went back in, she had gone, but there was a terrible feeling hanging in the room. It was very cold and dark even though the fire was lit and the lights were on. We knew from this atmosphere that she was still about. I kept asking myself, 'Where?'

Danny returned at this point and we explained what had happened. He then described the feeling he had experienced just before he had taken the kids out.

It was about an hour after that when the woman returned to the living room. I could sense her coming as soon as her feet touched the top of the stairs. Her approach was always accompanied by a cold breeze, and my stomach felt as if it was turning inside out from nervousness.

She attacked me again, banging me on the head. She always went for me there, and it wasn't long before I had a lot of bruising. My neck also took a lot of punishment where she had grabbed me.

Even though people got round me to cover and protect me, the only person who could really protect me was Greta. When the woman ever saw Greta put her arms around me or hold me, her look would change to anger and she would walk off as if in a rage.

I believe it was the love Greta and I shared for each other that kept me from getting seriously hurt. Any time the woman started to approach me, I would call out Greta's name and she would always be there. Even though Greta was terrified, she would find the strength from somewhere to come to my aid.

Danny and Sandra stayed with us until daylight, when we felt brave enough to be on our own again. We had stolen a little sleep here and there but we were wretched from lack of rest.

## Chapter 4 Monday 5th June

Greta phoned her family that Monday to explain what was happening, and they arrived down to see us about nine o'clock that night.

There was quite a crowd of them, fourteen in all. Greta's eldest sister Ann was there, all talk and joking as usual. Greta had a sister called Mary (Danny's mother, in fact) who was older than Ann; she had died when she was in her thirties. Ann is small and very thin, always very well-turned out, and never short of something to say. She said, 'Where's this ghost? I'll soon sort her out.'

I was pleased for Greta's sake. It was the first laughter in the house for what seemed to be a long time. Very soon everyone had settled down and questions such as 'What is it?' and 'Where did it come from?' were being fired at us.

After about an hour or so, the living room started to get very cold. I could sense that the woman was coming down the stairs. This was not a good sign – the room getting cold before she even appeared in it.

Some of our visitors began to react to the atmosphere and complain about the cold. I told them that she was coming. When some heard this they got very nervous, asking where she was.

Then she walked straight into the room. Not even this crowd of visitors daunted her. She paused to look about the room, taking in all the faces. For a moment, a flicker of curiosity crossed her face – the first expression other than anger that I'd seen there.

She came up to me and then began to go through her ritual of staring at me with her piercing dark eyes.

Ann thought she could feel the woman's dress as it brushed past her. I know it did – I saw it happen.

After what seemed like a few minutes of staring at me, she drew closer. Her intense expression changed from one of threat to one of anger. I started to panic and shouted for help.

About four or five of the visitors piled on top of me as protection, putting most of their efforts into guarding my head. I knew that there was no way that she could get near to me and so I felt safe. I could see through the press of people that she was now in a rage because she couldn't get at me. When she marched out of the room I told everybody that she was away and that it was all right to let me go.

Everyone in the room had been touched in some way by this thing. Ann's cross on a chain had been pulled from her neck. Some talked of the room being as cold as a fridge, others were certain that they had felt her passing them. It was a very frightening experience for all. I was disturbed by the way it had been able to tear off Ann's cross. It was a bad sign that she was not intimidated by holy objects.

Things were now beginning to look serious. One of Greta's nieces had brought along a beautiful wooden cross. We brought it out and sat it on the unit with some holy candles left by Fr O'Donnell along with instructions to use them if necessary.

Greta and Danny went into our bedroom to light a candle facing the Sacred Heart picture. Each time they lit it, the flame was blown out again. Meanwhile, the bedroom had grown cold, and the atmosphere of hovering darkness made it a very oppressive place to be. In the end they got the candle lit, but Danny was frightened by it, and afterwards he was jumpy.

(Danny later confided to me that it was as if the woman had been standing over his shoulder. Every time he lit a match, a light breeze would make it flicker and go out.)

After a while our visitors calmed down, so much so that the TV was put on. The TV hadn't been on in the house since this ordeal had started. It was a comfort just to have it on now, for it gave an appearance of normalcy even if it was only a hollow mockery of true peace of mind.

A good friend of mine, Tony, called in to visit. Tony was a very big man, with a good nature and he was a help to me in my trouble.

After a while I needed to go to the bathroom and Tony said that he would come along and make sure I was all right. My son Mark also came along. By this time, the kids had come down into the living room where they felt safer in with the crowd. This meant that we were upstairs with no one else on the upper floor.

After I went to the bathroom, I came out to find Tony and Mark talking about different parts of the landing being cooler than others. I joined them to see what they meant. As I walked about I could feel that it was cold in one spot and then warm. When we stood still, we could feel the cold coming and going as if it was moving about. I could feel it but there was nothing to see, which made me very nervous.

I knew that this woman was patrolling my landing as if we were the intruders and not she. There had to be a reason for her lying low at some times and then coming out and wreaking havoc at others. Some reason -- but what was it? While we walked up and down the stairs, examining this new phenomenon, I kept close to the others because their presence was a little reassuring. As I neared the bathroom, I began to feel a panic rising. There was something about this that I didn't like. Then as I reached the second bedroom, a force grabbed me as if I was a rag doll and flung me over the bannister. I landed on the first couple of steps with a jar that hurt my back. For a few seconds, I lay stunned, not really knowing what had happened. I was roused from my stupor by the approach of a cloud of coldness that came up from downstairs. Before I could recover, my legs were pulled up into the air and I was dragged down the stairs so that my head bounced off very step. I could see big Tony staring at me over the bannister, powerless to help me.

By the time I reached the bottom of the stairs, the visitors had heard the commotion. They spilled out from the living room, shouting and screaming. All I could see was their feet.

I was almost unconscious from the blows to my head, but then I saw something that almost made my heart stop in my chest. In among the feet of the visitors, I could see the lower half of the black dress that belonged to the woman as she stood over me. I started to run my eyes up to see what she was about to do, but a sudden forward movement from her galvanised me.

I cried out, 'She's there, she's there!'

Everybody stood over me, forming a human barricade, and the woman was forced to turn away and go back upstairs.

My kids joined in, rushing out in their pyjamas, crying and screaming, adding to the din.

Some of Greta's sisters could stand no more. They were taken home in cars and my kids went to stay with them and other relatives.

This all happened so quickly that I was still lying on the floor.

Before I could get up, there came a series of deafening thuds from up on the landing. It was as if someone was dancing about upstairs. I didn't know whether she was dancing with delight at having got to me or whether she was angry at having been driven off again. The noise was terrifying. In amongst all this racket, I could hear her shouting. The words were indistinct with the background babble of frightened relatives, but I was sure that she was shouting 'Get out! Get out!'

With all this racket going on, I was brought back into the living room. I stretched out on the sofa to catch my breath. Everyone was well and truly shaking. I thought about how the woman had been able to fool me. For the first time she had kept herself invisible to me, as if to hide in ambush in order to get me alone. I could have so easily been killed! Did she really want to kill me? Or, did she just enjoy tormenting me?

A short time after this, I was surprised to see her walk in to the living

room again. She stood in the middle of the room, gloating – then she made another grab at me.

I tried to dodge out of the way, but she had me hemmed in at a corner. Her hands leaped out again and again to slap me about the head, neck and shoulders. Despite the pain from her stinging blows, I was angry enough to think, 'Have you not done enough already to me?'

Then Deirdre, Greta's other sister, produced the cross and pushed it against me. The woman recoiled for a moment, but then she grew even more aggressive. She lifted me bodily and flung me into the corner of the room.

Everybody who saw it was horrified! To see a man lifted up in the air and thrown straight across the room! All by himself, because of course they couldn't see her.

The landing dazed me, but when my head cleared again, I could still see the woman towering over me. I managed to stagger to my feet, only to receive a further rain of blows to my head. I had to fight back. Instinctively, I struck out, not able to gauge my blows. It was pure anger and frustration on my part. It didn't do much good. As far as everyone else was concerned all they could see was me just hitting out at the wall.

The woman looked pleased as if she had wanted to goad me into retaliating. Turning on her heel, she stalked out of the room.

'You bastard!' I shouted. I grabbed the wooden cross from Deirdre and ran out after the woman.

By the time I reached the hall, she was halfway up the stairs. With the cross in hand, I ran up after her. I don't really know what I intended to do with the cross. I suppose I had some half-formed plan to use it like a weapon – a battle-axe, or a meat-cleaver. But I never got the chance.

She turned and grabbed my arm, pushing the cross away from her. For a moment I matched my strength against her. I held my own. But it was only for a moment. With a supernatural ease, she exerted herself. I went backwards, straining to hold my own. Then she smiled mirthlessly, and pushed me back. I lost my hold on the cross. Off balance now, I lost my

footing and went head over heels down the stairs.

I wasted no time regaining my feet, and pressing the struggle. I took a single step up the stairs and then froze. The woman was staring down at me, the cross in one hand, her eyes lit with a hellish light. I froze in my tracks. My mind was racing, but my body was locked in place, my feet rooted to the spot.

With a look of mockery on her face, she dropped the cross to the stairs and put a foot on it as a mark of contempt. As she saw the look of horror on my face at her blasphemous act, she put her head back and laughed.

My visitors in the meantime had followed me out and I turned to shout, 'She's got the cross! She's standing on the cross!' I made another effort to climb the stairs, but the woman no longer needed to keep me frozen in place. My visitors held me back, fearing for my safety.

Greta and some of the women made a dash up the stairs but the woman still stood laughing. Then she turned and walked up to the landing. The women pursued her to the top of the stairs but they weren't chasing her. This woman never ran, she just walked at a leisurely pace, yet it was still fast enough for her to be one step ahead of them.

After this we sat for a while describing our feelings of horror. There were fourteen witnesses in the house which led us to believe that the woman in black enjoyed playing to an audience. We had hoped that a large number of people in the house would have made her stop her activities, but this did not seem to be the case.

She was having her fun and as usual I was at the receiving end. I shivered at the memory of the way she had snatched the crucifix out of my hand. She was powerful; she had no fear; and she was determined to continue with her reign of terror.

A few people stayed on with us for the rest of the night. I was grateful for their company for I didn't have much fight left in me. With my children out of the house I felt as if I had lost them. Greta was in a terrible state, but despite my anxieties, something told me to keep fighting. I was not

about to let this woman – this thing – force me out of my home. But, in order to fight her I was going to need a lot of help and support.

## Chapter 5 Tuesday / Wednesday

The next day, Tuesday, we decided to send for Fr O'Donnell and ask him to spend the night with us. Maybe he could help us in some way if he was actually in the house when she appeared.

By now the whole day-to-day running of the house was virtually non-existent. No cooking was being done, nor any washing. Greta and I hadn't eaten properly in four days and it was starting to show on the both of us. Even during the day we felt the presence of the woman. Downstairs, we felt her passing us. Occasionally she would switch things on and off.

We kept our front door open so we could look out and watch people passing by. It was as if the whole world was getting on with the business of living while Greta and I were trapped in a nightmare. We felt very lonely and left out.

That night, instead of Greta's sisters coming, it was all men who arrived to give us moral support.

I decided to get Greta out of the house because the priest was coming to stay. Greta didn't want to leave because she felt that she was the only one who could protect me from the woman in black. I finally convinced her that with Fr O'Donnell coming I felt much safer. Eventually Greta gave in and went to stay with her sister, who lived a few miles away. When Greta left, I was overcome with a feeling of terrible loss. Greta and I had come through a lot together and now I was on my own.

As night drew on, I wondered what the woman's reaction would be to

Fr O'Donnell.

A disturbing new element was emerging outside the house. A crowd of at least two hundred people had gathered. This annoyed me. As far as I was concerned they were treating my plight as a peep show. They were waiting for something to happen to me, relishing my terror. I was glad now that Greta had gone for this would have upset her.

By the time Fr O'Donnell arrived the crowd had swelled to include some photographers. One even came up to the door and asked me if he could come in and take photos inside. I told him to go away because I didn't want any of this kind of publicity.

When the crowd saw Fr O'Donnell arrive, a murmur of excitement rose. All kinds of commentš were passed, along the lines of exorcism and so on.

Inside, I introduced Fr O'Donnell to those present. Everyone later agreed about how friendly and very understanding he was.

As we sat through that night, the atmosphere was very convivial. There were jokes being told – some of them by Fr O'Donnell. I began to feel relaxed for the first time in days. The mood was such that a few of the men had a couple of beers.

Well, I don't know if it was the fact that Fr O'Donnell was present, but the woman never showed. A few times the temperature dropped but there was nothing as frightening as it had been.

Outside the crowd stayed on, remaining well into the early hours.

Inside we said a few prayers, including the Rosary, and at about 4 o'clock Fr O'Donnell left.

I left soon after him to join Greta, who was relieved to see me and pleased that everything had gone all right.

We returned the next morning and a few of our close neighbours stopped us to ask how we were and to tell us to watch ourselves in the house. They were very concerned for our safety. Even though it was Greta and I who endured the ordeal, we still had a thought for our neighbours. Their whole way of life was badly affected by this presence.

Most of that day the door never stopped with people giving us holy water and holy pictures with blessings. We couldn't believe how many people were willing to stand by us. Some of them were people we never usually bothered with, but they were coming to us to offer any help they could. News of what was happening had made them very concerned.

Unfortunately, there were also people who started some ugly rumours. One rumour accused us of using a ouija board. Another one said we had let the IRA use our home for punishment beatings, etc. The most hurtful one was that I was supposed to have beaten Greta and that this woman was beating me as a sort of psychic revenge. It was hard to believe how far they were prepared to go to cause some kind of scandal.

This sort of reaction, however, was very limited. Most people were very kind and understanding. They came to the door with tea and sandwiches because they knew we weren't feeding ourselves. Some came into the house to sit with us during the day. This was a great help, especially to Greta, for it helped to keep her mind off the presence.

It got that I couldn't even go to the door to get air – there were people staring or coming up and asking all kinds of questions. It was very embarrassing.

Some people asked me if I minded whether they started reciting the Rosary outside my house. I agreed to it as I thought that anything might help.

My house was set in a cul-de-sac. The area facing it was a meeting point for the local youth, who gathered there in the summer evenings. They never gave any trouble, but would sit and share a joke among themselves. Now, though, they weren't to be seen and I'd heard that some people were even afraid to walk past my house.

It was now Wednesday and we had gone through four days of hell. Even though the night before was quiet, we could still sense that the woman was in the house. If you went upstairs for anything, your hair would stand on end and goosebumps would come up on your arms.

Even downstairs, if Greta was using the vacuum cleaner it would go off and on by itself. Doors opened and closed by themselves.

That night, a few neighbours stayed with us, along with Greta's niece Mary and her husband, Tommy. Mary is Danny's sister and although she is young she showed a lot of maturity about the whole thing. Tommy, once he heard of our plight, was willing to do anything to help. They were going to stay the night with us in the spare room downstairs. Cathy was there and she talked of whether Fr O'Donnell might have made some sort of difference to the house.

'Maybe,' she said, 'Fr O'Donnell has put this thing in its place.'

Greta and I had our doubts: we knew our home and this didn't feel like it.

Around 4 o'clock in the morning our other visitors left and Greta and I decided to try and get some sleep. We put Mary and Tommy in our room and went into the room used by our only daughter, Joanne.

Even though we had been advised to keep her out of the house for her own good, it was painful to look about her bedroom and to know that she was somewhere else. We missed all of our kids with a kind of quiet desperation.

We lay whispering to each other about how we were feeling. We were both longing to sleep, but afraid to close our eyes. Eventually we fell asleep but when we woke, I was lying across the bedroom door. Both of us had very sore throats and we wondered if she had been there while we slept. We shivered at the thought.

Then I noticed a TV cameraman outside the window and I heard the door being knocked. I checked with Mary and Tom but they had gone home. With us being on our own in the house, I didn't want to open the door to a reporter. The news team left soon after and I heard that they had interviewed some of our neighbours. They had even talked to Fr O'Donnell, but he had told them very little.

Shortly afterwards, Fr O'Donnell came to the house to check on us. He found Greta in a bad state, on the verge of cracking up.

He sat on the edge of her bed and tried to console her, explaining to her what he thought it was that was going on.

He said: 'What would you do if a woman in the street tried to have an affair with your husband?'

Greta replied, 'I'd kill her!'

Fr O'Donnell said, 'Well, that is what you are going to have to do to this thing in your house – fight it!'

As I explained to Fr O'Donnell that the house had been quiet for two nights in a row, Greta suddenly burst out crying.

She shouted, 'She was in this room while we were sleeping!'

Fr O'Donnell said, 'If she was in here and you were asleep, how do you know?'

Greta showed him the red marks on her throat. 'When I woke up, Father, I had a terrible sore throat. And John was lying on the floor as if she had been throwing him about again in his sleep.'

She then said something that really got to me. 'Father, it's getting that I'm afraid to sleep in the same bed as John.'

For a few seconds I felt as if my whole life was coming to an end. Then I looked at Fr O'Donnell and saw the look of shock on his face.

Fr O'Donnell put his hands on ours and joined our hands together. He said: 'Don't let this thing come between you. You are good people and whatever this thing is, it will go away.' He added, 'You should feel honoured because you have turned a lot of people back to their prayers.'

He was referring to the people reciting the Rosary outside my house. Although I didn't argue with him at the time, I didn't accept this notion that we were being put through this to bring people back to their faith. It didn't make sense to me. Here we had a whole family broken up – innocent children terrorised and driven away from their home, visitors frightened if they put a foot over the door. No – I didn't accept it. I just couldn't.

## Chapter 6 Thursday / Friday

That Thursday evening, Danny and Sandra called in. In order to reach the house, they had to make their way through the groups of people who had gathered outside. There weren't as many as before, but it was still a considerable crowd.

The four of us chatted away and then the door was knocked again. This time it was a couple of friends of mine. I used to work as a barman and these were a couple of regulars from that establishment. Since they had a few drinks in them, I took them into the working kitchen away from Greta and the others. I spent about half an hour with them and then I heard Sandra calling out to me.

From the tone of her voice something was wrong, so I suggested to my friends that they should leave as I didn't really know what I was going to face.

When I opened the living room door I saw to my horror that the woman in black was standing over Greta. Although Greta couldn't see her, she could sense her presence. I glanced at Danny and he was sitting there as white as a sheet. I began to run to Greta, but the front door was knocked again. Danny jumped to his feet and ran to open it as I reached Greta.

The woman stepped back a few feet, but she made it clear she wasn't going away. She glared at me with real menace in her eyes. I knew someone was going to get it and all I could hope for was that it would be me and not Greta.

Danny returned from answering the door to usher in Greta's nephew Brian. He had his two mates with him, Eddie and Paul. Brian was Ann's son; he had heard about our trouble and was down to see if he could help. He was around twenty, tall, and lightly built.

As soon as Eddie saw Greta and me, he ran towards us, for he could tell that something was wrong. The woman was still standing over Greta. She looked so angry that I feared for Greta's safety.

As Eddie came towards us, to my utter horror he walked right into the woman. As soon as he passed into her he stopped. He stood there, shaking violently and breathing as if he was having a fit. Paul, meanwhile, plunged so abruptly into the midst of this madness, could only stand and gape.

I lifted a bottle of holy water and threw the lot over the woman. This soaked Eddie and I put my arms around Greta. She was shaking and weeping, alarmed by the presence that hovered so close. The woman drew back, her face working terribly as if in the grip of an awful rage. When she saw my defiant stare, she turned and made her way to the hall.

A few moments later, Cathy appeared and immediately recognised that we had been under psychic attack once again. She tried her best to get Eddie settled, and it took us about half an hour to get relaxed.

Danny explained to me what had happened. 'We were just sittin', talkin', and then all of a sudden it began to get cold. Real cold. That was all right, because I've felt it cold like that before, and you know that she's just passin' you by. But then,' he paused, his eyes widening with the memory of it.

'But then, I began to get this idea in my head that there was somethin' sittin' on the arm of my chair. I made to move – y'know, just stick my hand out to see if I could touch her. But it was as if I had no power in my hand. Just when I realised that she had to be there, I felt it get up and move away. I thought it was headin' towards Greta. I shouted to our Sandra, "Get John in here! Right away!"'

Greta took up the tale: 'We were just sittin' here, John, and we saw Danny's face go white.'

'It was worse than just pale,' said Sandra. 'I could see his eyes moving as if he knew that she was right beside him. I saw him tryin' to move and the look on his face when he realised that he couldn't.'

'It's just as well I came over when I did,' said Cathy. She turned to me. 'A cousin of mine, Margaret Conway, gave me this.' She held up a gold holy medal on a chain. 'She knows that you've been havin' a hard time lately and this would give you some protection. I thought I'd better come over tonight and make sure you had it. If there's anybody needs protectin', John, it's you.'

'Thanks very much, Cathy,' I said, putting it on. I was touched by this kindness from a stranger.

Cathy turned to Eddie, 'What was the matter with you? I came in and you were soakin' wet!'

Eddie shook the droplets of holy water out of his clothes. 'All I know is that I just walked into the room. The first thing I saw was Greta standin' there as if someone had a gun to her head. I just started to walk over to her. As I got close, it was like walkin' into a fridge. I've never felt anything like it before. It was like there was this cold spot right in the middle of the room. I couldn't move, or speak, or anythin'!'

I said, 'Well, Eddie, I hope you don't lose any sleep over this, but I saw you walk right through the ghost! That's where the cold emanates from. Danny felt it when she sat on the arm of his chair. That's how Greta knew she was near even though Greta couldn't see her.'

Eddie looked worried and went very quiet after that.

Again the door was knocked, and in came Kevin, a close friend of mine. Kevin's hobby was playing the organ. He was a very witty person, a Protestant who had married a Catholic girl and we had been to his wedding. He had come around to express his concern about the problems we'd been having.

With Kevin, there were nine of us in the room and we were feeling very jumpy. No sooner had he started to speak than *she* came into the room again.

She paused for a few seconds, to look around the company, and then she came towards me, almost breaking into a trot in order to reach me quickly. I tried to dodge out of her way, although this meant that I was hiding behind Kevin to protect myself. It still didn't do me any good. She grabbed my leg and pulled. I held onto the sofa for a moment, resisting her, but then I lost my grip. When I went, Kevin went with me, and we were both hauled onto the floor. He hadn't seen her so he was even more terrified at what was happening. He lay on the floor trembling. I was beside him, too shaken to move. The woman stood laughing at us.

When she walked out of the room, I couldn't tell if she had gone upstairs, which meant that she had to be either in the hall or in the downstairs bedroom.

Kevin and I had still not risen from the floor when the front door was knocked. It was two girls that Greta knew, and they were wondering what was going on. When they were told, they couldn't believe it.

In the midst of all this commotion, Eddie had run out to phone Fr O'Donnell in order to get him over to help us. He now came back to tell us that he had left word for the priest. A half hour after that, a neighbour came to the house to say that Fr O'Donnell would not be able to come because he was not well. The person who brought this message was a fellow from further up the estate and he had not been in the house before. Since he was a stranger, Greta wasn't too keen on inviting him into the house in case something happened to frighten him.

When he didn't seem to be afraid, we brought him in. He sat down to explain the message and then the woman in black returned. Greta's two friends were still in the house, so there were now twelve people there. I shouted for Greta to protect me but she was too late.

The woman grabbed me by the neck and banged my head off the wall repeatedly. Her grip was so strong and the blows were so violent that my eyes were nearly popping out of my head. Kevin was the first to grab me, and then Greta got to me. Kevin and I were flung over the sofa, leaving Greta screaming.

Greta's two friends ran out of the house in hysterics, while the man who had brought the message was sitting there speechless. He had experienced the cold sensation and witnessed two men being thrown bodily over the sofa.

He said, 'If I hadn't seen that I would never have believed it. You know, I've heard the rumours about this house, but I've never really given them any credit. I'll tell you something, Mr Skillen, there's something at work here – something very bad.'

Just at that moment the front door was banged. When it was opened, Fr O'Donnell walked in.

'I was lying in bed, thinking about you,' he said.

'You got our message, then?' I asked.

'Message? What message?'

Brian spoke up, 'I phoned Clonard Monastery an hour ago to ask you to come over. Was that message not passed onto you?'

'I got no message,' replied Fr O'Donnell. 'At least, no verbal message. But you two,' he embraced Greta and I with his words, 'have been on my mind a lot lately. It's only natural, I know. You're both going through a terrible experience here. But even apart from my natural concern for you – I got a feeling. I don't even know if you can call it a feeling, but it was a sense, an instinct of some sort. So, when I got this feeling, I thought I'd better take myself over here as quick as I could.'

'But it's three o'clock in the morning,' I said.

'I knew you were in trouble,' he said simply.

'I'm really glad to see you, Father,' I began and then I proceeded to relate to him all of the events of this evening. He was very disturbed to learn what had been happening.

As he took off his coat, I caught a glimpse out of the corner of my eye. It was a glimpse of the black dress entering the room. I let out a yell, and the others started to shout, 'She's here, she's here.'

I shouted, 'Father, she's standing there, right behind you. She's over in that corner.'

She came marching towards me. I flung myself behind Fr O'Donnell and started to cry like a baby.

Fr O'Donnell took his crucifix in his hand and he raised his arm to ward her off. I looked to see she was still coming on. Taking a tight grip on Fr O'Donnell's jacket, I shouted, 'Father, she's coming over to us!'

Fr O'Donnell started to pray loudly.

Still she came.

I kept shouting, 'Father, help me.'

She paused then, as if meeting some sort of resistance. Glaring at Fr O'Donnell with hatred in her eyes, she turned and stormed out.

I could feel Fr O'Donnell's heart thumping and knew that he was shaken. He said, 'There was *something* there. I don't know what, but there was definitely *something* there.'

He glanced about at the others. 'Would one of you good people have a car?'

Brian said, 'My car is parked just across the street, Father.'

Fr O'Donnell said, 'Would you have any objection to driving me over to Clonard?'

Brian flushed. 'If it'll help John and Greta, Father, I'd drive you to the moon!'

'Clonard's quite far enough,' said Fr O'Donnell with a tired smile. 'I believe we need to perform a Mass. The rite of Holy Communion in the living room might provide an odour of sanctity that will drive out this manifestation. In order for me to do that, I'll need a few things.'

'You must have some sort of idea of what we're up against here, Father,' I said.

He wouldn't meet my eyes. 'I don't want to say anything to get your hopes up, John. But we have to try something. There's no doubt in my mind that this house is haunted by something. Just what I don't know and quite frankly, I don't care to know, either.'

Fr O'Donnell's words were little comfort. I grew even more worried, saying over and over to myself, 'What could it be?' I felt sick at the

thought – whatever it was it must be really serious if it required a Mass at this hour of the morning. The urgency of his words and the speed with which he was operating suggested to me that we had reached some sort of crisis.

Before Fr O'Donnell left, he paused and looked around at everyone. 'I may be gone for some time, but I want everyone to stay here until I come back.'

He found no dissenters and he went on his way with Brian.

While we waited for his return, we prepared an altar. No-one left the room, staying together for safety. By now we all thought the house was very dangerous – if it was prepared to take on Fr O'Donnell, what chance would ordinary people have against it?

I was beginning to feel worn down, losing my fight. When I looked at Greta I knew that she couldn't take much more of this. For the first time, I began to think of giving up my home. This thing was forcing me into submission. No-one else was getting beaten; no-one else could even *see* this thing, and I still had my doubts that Fr O'Donnell could help.

After about twenty minutes, Fr O'Donnell returned bringing with him everything that he would need.

He saw that we had set up our temporary altar in the living room and said, 'That's good. I see you haven't been idle while I was away. ' He clapped his hands together in a business-like way and added, 'I want to give you all a General Absolution, so that when the time comes, you may partake of the Holy Communion.'

At this, Kevin cleared his throat nervously and said, 'It might make a difference, Father, but I'm a Protestant.'

Fr O'Donnell looked at him steadily. 'From what I heard of the events earlier, you were actually physically assaulted by this manifestation. I can't force you, but if you have any consideration for John and Greta, you'll join with us. We'll need all the spiritual solidarity we can muster.'

Kevin paled at the memory of the woman's attack on him and murmured, 'Just so long as you know that I'm not a member of your flock,

Father. I'd hate to take anything under false pretences.'

And so the General Absolution was spoken and the Mass performed and Holy Communion partaken by all present. During this time the house grew quiet, the atmosphere lightened, but only to suggest that the woman had withdrawn from our immediate vicinity. There was no real sense of general relief to suggest that she had been completely ousted.

Fr O'Donnell stayed with us until daylight came. By six o'clock everyone else departed and Greta and I were left to talk over what had happened. We were too frightened to sleep.

Later that day, Fr O'Donnell returned to see us. Greta was more worried about him, because he looked so pale and strained, no longer his usual calm self. We talked for a while and Fr O'Donnell asked us if we thought the house felt changed.

I replied, 'To be honest, Father, I don't think it has made a great deal of a difference. We really appreciate all the trouble that you've gone to, but I think this thing has us beaten. Tonight'll tell a tale, but I'm pretty sure she'll be back.'

Fr O'Donnell nodded when he heard this, as if we were only confirming his own instincts. 'Well,' he said, 'if you feel like that, then there is nothing to be done about it. You'll have to leave. There's only so much flesh and blood can do against such manifestations.'

He saw our stricken expressions and went on: 'Oh, yes, I know I advised you only a few days ago to stay and fight this thing, but I was speaking from general principles then. Now, I'm speaking from experience. But think about what it is that you're giving up. It's only bricks and mortar. Compare that to what it is that you're risking by staying here for even another few nights. You have to think of your children. They can't live in a house where a wilful spirit is free to roam and perform mischief as it sees fit.

'I'm truly sorry,' he went on, 'but there it is. I've done all that I'm capable of. You are the main target, John, and you seem to have the greatest affinity with this manifestation. You know that it's still here. It

wants you out. Now – in your heart of hearts – who do you think will win?'

When we couldn't answer, he went on: 'No, it's more important that you cut your losses while you've had no real harm done to yourself. I don't know why or how these things normally operate, but this spirit appears to be getting stronger and more rebellious. It certainly doesn't want you in the house, so why not go somewhere else? Let the house stand empty for a wee while and maybe it'll lose interest. You know how some things seem to get stronger only because they're resisted. Maybe that's what will happen here. Again, I don't know for sure, but I certainly think it's the safest course of action.'

He rose to go. I showed him out, saying, 'Well, you've certainly given us a lot to think about, Father. We're going to have to give it some serious thought.'

He shook my hand. 'Put all of this behind you, John. Take Greta and the kids away. You owe it to them.'

All that day Greta and I talked about what we would do if we did leave.

'For a start, ' said Greta, 'where can we go? The kids are already missing us. We'd have to find them somewhere to stay.'

'I know, ' I said. 'I'm missing them badly myself.'

We were interrupted by the door being knocked. When I answered it, I found Margaret, Ta's wife, there.

'How are yous both?' she asked, stepping inside. 'I've been worried about yous, so I thought I'd come over and see how you are after last night.'

'Did you hear about Fr O'Donnell coming round at three o'clock in the morning and saying a Mass for us here in the living room?'

'My God!' exclaimed Margaret, 'did you ever hear the like of it! Where is it going to end, Greta?'

Greta shrugged unhappily. 'It's liable to end with us on the streets and the childer taken into care, Margaret.'

'God save us,' said Margaret, 'what are yous talkin' about?'

'Fr O'Donnell,' I said, 'thinks that he can do no more for us. He says we should get out.'

Margaret said, 'Well, if Fr O'Donnell says get out, then if I were you I'd listen to him. He wouldn't say a thing like that unless he meant it.'

'But that's easier said than done, Margaret,' said Greta. 'Where would we stay? Sure, we moved into this place because we needed the extra room when Joanne came along. Where are we going to find another four bedroom house just like that? We were on the waitin' list for years before we got this place.'

'This is an emergency,' said Margaret, a look of determination on her face. 'What sort of a friend would I be if I couldn't offer you a room in our house?'

'Catch yourself on, Margaret,' said Greta. 'It's very decent of you to offer an' all, but we couldn't impose ourselves on you and Ta like that.'

Margaret rose to go. 'You were the ones who told me what Fr O'Donnell said. Are you going to take his advice or not? If yous are, then there's a place for yous both along with me and Ta. If you're not going to listen to him, then I only hope yous both don't live to regret it. I'm away on home now, but my offer still stands. You can talk it over between yourselves and get back to me.'

With that, Margaret left, but when I came back from seeing her to the door, I knew by the shine in Greta's eyes that we had found a good, true friend in her. Our hearts told us to take her up on her offer, even though our heads told us that we couldn't live on a friend's kindness forever.

Greta said softly, 'Well, Margaret's offer is good. But she can't have room for us and the kids, John. What are we going to do about them?'

'Well,' I said slowly, trying to think of everything at once, 'we know that Danny and Sandra are very fond of Joanne and Gerard. If we could get them to help us out for a few weeks. I know it's a hell of a lot to ask, but if their reaction is anything like Margaret's – and I'm pretty sure it will be – we'll be over the worst of this. For all we know Fr O'Donnell could be right. If we give this thing a few weeks to get over its bad temper, then

it might just go away and leave us alone. A few weeks could be all that we need.'

Greta nodded. 'We've got good neighbours, John. They've stood behind us so far. They'll help us through.' Her voice gave a little catch. 'I can't believe this sometimes. It was only a week ago that we were perfectly settled, with hardly a care in the world. And now – now we're askin' the neighbours if they'll take our kids in off the streets, because we've nowhere to live!'

I held her close in comfort. 'We'll pull through, love,' I told her. 'We'll pull through.'

So we were decided. Greta and I would stay in the house one more night, in order to give Margaret a chance to get herself organised. We started to make up a bag of clothes for each of the kids to take with them. They were still staying with Greta's sisters and we knew that the relatives were getting fed up with them. They would hardly admit it but they were afraid to keep our kids because of the thing in our house – which was stupid because our kids had been there for a few days already and nothing strange or out of the way had happened.

That night my sisters, Mary and Madge, came to the house. They spent some time with us – just long enough to learn what had been happening. When they heard all of the amazing events, their advice was for us to leave. We explained that we would have to split up the kids, but even though Mary offered to take one of them, we got the feeling they were afraid of having anything to do with us. If our neighbours hadn't helped out we would have been reduced to roaming the streets. When I thought it over afterwards, I had to concede that maybe they were afraid of their own kids mixing with mine. But the more I thought about it, I knew this story wouldn't wash. They'd looked after the kids for a few nights with no harmful effects. Our families were quite content to hand out advice but when it came to the crunch, none of them were willing to help us.

A few well-wishers dropped by to join my sisters. Ta came over to

make sure that we were still definite about leaving to come and stay with him and Margaret.

One of the visitors was a friend of mine from years ago, Mickey Bradley. We went to school together and I had seen him on and off through the years, but we had more or less gone in different directions. As a child Mickey was tall and thin and he still was. He had a touch of asthma when he was a child and I think it still affected him. What he was about to tell me would give the whole situation a strange new twist.

Mickey described an incident that occurred over a year before. One night, as he and his wife were preparing for bed, his wife saw an apparition. Mickey went on to describe in detail things that made my skin prickle. It was the woman in black right down to the last detail!

Mickey lived only two hundred yards away from me at the time of this incident. They moved out immediately after this and Mickey was glad to hear that I was planning to go too.

Thinking over Mickey's story made me recall a suggestion made by someone – that the ground itself might be the problem and not the actual house itself. In other words, the thing could have sprung up anywhere...

During the course of the evening, the woman in black appeared in the living room, but there were no beatings or anything like that. I got the impression that she had come to enjoy her victory. She knew that we were leaving and she had won. She touched some of the visitors, including my sisters. She walked up close to them so that they could feel the cold emanations of her presence. When that happened, they hastily rose and left, vowing never to set foot in the house again.

I couldn't help sneering at the way they left the house so easily. When I thought of what we had gone through in an effort to keep our home, I knew that leaving was the right thing to do.

## Chapter 7 After the Flit

The following day, we prepared to move house. One of our neighbours Bernie Manning, called to tell us that a few people from Mount Mellory were coming to see us.

'Mount Mellory?' I said. 'What do they want with us?'

'These people belong to a sort of committee based in Mellory,' explained my neighbour. 'You know – the scene of visions of Our Lady.'

My memory was jogged at last. 'Oh, aye, I've heard of them. They're said to be blessed and they can bless others.' But that still didn't explain what they wanted to see me about.

They arrived later that day: a man called Cairn and two ladies. They came into the house and sat down to talk.

Cairn was a tall, soft-spoken man with dark hair and a swarthy complexion. I didn't catch the ladies' names. One was petite, brunette and very talkative; the other was memorable for the story she told me about her son. When he turned to drink, she had no-one who was interested in helping him – until she met this committee from Mount Mellory. Now she had sorted out her own problems and had volunteered to help others with theirs.

Cairn explained: 'I'm going into a monastery soon. I've been hearing reports about your house and I was wondering if we could be of any help.'

'We've already had Fr O'Donnell say a Mass in the living room. He felt the thing's presence and he says we should leave. I don't like having

to do it, but it's our only option at the moment.'

'Perhaps if you told us of your experiences,' suggested Cairn.

So I started from the beginning and told him everything.

When I'd finished, Cairn said, 'You may well have been chosen to go through this as a means of bringing others back to their faith.'

'I've heard that before. Fr O'Donnell said it too, but he said it before he had spent a night in the house and really had a taste of what we have to go through. Don't think I'm bein' cheeky when I say this, but I'm fed up hearing that "you have been chosen to bring others faith" routine. No offence, but you haven't put in the time we have, and until you do, you don't know what it is you're talkin' about.'

Cairn smiled. 'No offence meant, none taken. But we are sincere in our desire to help you.'

One of the ladies spoke up: 'I have a feeling that there's something blocking our communication. Do either of you get the same feeling?' she enquired of her friends.

Cairn nodded. 'You're right. The place does have an atmosphere. It's like a wake without a corpse. There's a resistance to clear thinking about this subject.'

The second lady said, 'What if we went upstairs? We could compare the feelings up there.'

Cairn looked at me for permission. I said, 'Don't let me stand in your way. I just hope you don't get your head in your hands.'

They went upstairs, and I continued packing. After a short time, they came down again and Cairn said, 'We don't have any sensation upstairs, but we are sure that there is a presence here, in the living room. We appreciate that you have a lot on your mind here – you're being driven out of your home – but could we ask you to leave the room for a moment?'

I stared at him blankly for a moment.

He explained, 'We would like to learn if the presence follows you about.'

'Since I've nothin' better to do,' I said. I went outside, feeling like an

eejit performing in a pantomime that nobody knew the script of. After a few minutes, Cairn and his friends called me back in again.

Cairn told me, 'You'll be relieved to learn that the presence seems to stay in this room. It didn't follow you about. So you aren't the focus.'

I didn't say too much, but his words were a relief. It's bad enough going through an experience like this, without learning that you are the sole reason for the manifestation. The house being haunted was one thing; myself being haunted was another matter altogether.

As we continued with our conversation, it seemed that every time they started to talk to me, they stopped in the middle of what they were trying to say. It was very strange. After a while they gave up and Cairn said:

'Is there somewhere else where we can talk? The atmosphere is not very conducive to our discussion.'

I suggested that we go next door to Bernie's house. On the way, one of the women said:

'I had a very strange experience in your house, Mr Skillen.'

'Oh? What sort of experience?'

She hesitated. 'I'd rather not say. I don't think you're in quite the right frame of mind to hear about it.'

'That's a big comfort,' I said.

Once we settled in Bernie's house, they found they were able to talk.

Cairn said, 'From the feelings that we get in the house, Mr Skillen, we can sense that your wife will go through a very hard time in the future.'

I sat forward, immediately concerned, 'A hard time? What does that mean? Can you not tell me any more than that?'

'We can't really be any more specific, but she will suffer – from ordinary people – but most of all from her friends.'

I received this news with mixed emotions. Cairn saw this and said: 'Would you like us to pray for a blessing on you and your family?'

I said yes, and they gave us a blessing and reassured us that our lives would start to change now. 'You're leaving the house,' said Cairn. 'That's a wise move. You'll get a new home before long and your children

will be finally re-united with you.'

We prayed to God that they were right.

We left the house that night, settling the children in the homes we found for them. Greta and I were to sleep in Ta and Margaret's and spend our days either in Danny's or just wandering the streets.

The first few days of this new regime weren't too bad. We rose each morning, took a cup of tea in Margaret's and then made our way up the street to Danny's house where our two youngest children were staying. Sometimes we would sit there for a while and then we would take a walk over to our old house and sit on the steps outside. We rarely ventured inside. Some of our neighbours made us tea and we would sit and talk for hours, just trying to get our day in.

Our older children would drop by and we used to send out for hamburgers. People would make us cups of tea. It was the only way we could feed them. I felt that we were a terrible imposition on people. Not only were our kids sleeping in their houses, but they were being fed by them as well.

I felt particularly sorry for my kids. They looked so lost. I don't think they knew just how serious the situation was. After the first few nights of the thing starting up in the house, they made up their minds that they would never enter the house again. That was understandable, but what could we do? The kids couldn't understand why we all couldn't be together.

Those first few days set the pattern for the days and weeks that were to follow. As time went on the neighbours who lived to the right of our old house, Fra and Margorie Norney, informed us how they were kept awake all through the night with the way the lights would go on and off by themselves and by the banging and thuds of doors opening and closing.

The crowd of people who had gathered each night to say the Rosary were still keeping constant. About twenty of them would recite the Rosary until about two o'clock each morning. They too witnessed the strange goings on. They reported seeing the shadow of someone or something

passing the downstairs windows. They had erected a small altar outside the house and they found it difficult to light candles on it. Even when the candles were burning well, they would often flicker and die just as if someone had come along and blown them out. When one or two of them ventured close to the door, they could sometimes hear a low voice from inside. No-one could make out or understand what was being said, but it was a frightening thing to hear. As a result of this, they kept well back from the door while they continued with their devotions.

Fr O'Donnell kept in contact with us. He would call to see us and ask how we were getting on. He admitted that he hadn't any idea of when we might be able to return home. He and the other priests over in the monastery had discussed our case for hours.

He added, 'Some say that it could be a poltergeist. Others talk of something evil, partaking not of mortal nature at all. But you know of course that we're not allowed to admit to such things in public. I'm afraid all I can do is support you as you come to terms with your new predicament.'

'People living around our house are still very frightened, Father,' I said. 'Some of the closer neighbours are on tablets to help them sleep at night. I know other people who have never touched a drop of alcohol in their life before and now they're drinking every night just to take their mind off it.'

'So I'm told,' replied Fr O'Donnell.

'It's got so bad, Father, that people have started to go to bed with the lights on. It's affecting the whole neighbourhood.'

Fr O'Donnell nodded, his eyes covered by a hand thrown across his troubled brows. 'I know, John. They talk to me about it every day.'

'They even –' I hesitated as I broached the subject, then steeled myself and plunged ahead. 'They've even asked me to ask you, Father, if you would say another Mass.'

I waited for his answer, not daring to hope for a yes. I knew what I was asking of him and he was not a young man.

He sighed and said, 'How do you feel about this? It is your house, after all.'

'It's not the house that I'm worried about, Father, it's you. I don't have to live with it any longer. I still have to live with its effects – and so do my neighbours. And if you think you can help them, then I think you should go ahead with it. But only as long as you can stand it, and only as long as it might help matters.'

'I have no other option, John, than to go through with it. I can't stand back and wash my hands of this thing. But I do have one favour to ask of you.'

'Ask away, father.'

'I'd like to stand in your hallway and say the Mass from there. It would have no effect if the door was closed and the house locked up, but I don't want to go in any more than I have to. Oh, yes, and I would also need something for an altar.'

'You're going to have your back to whatever it is that's inside the house,' I said. I could have said more, but I didn't want to make it any harder for him to say yes than it already was. I added, 'I'm sure we can rustle up an altar from somewhere, Father.'

I felt sick to the stomach for Fr O'Donnell. I wondered what was going through his mind. I had visions of him saying the Mass and then the door slamming shut, locking him inside the house on his own.

The night of the Mass was set for a Tuesday night at 7.30. Greta's brothers and sister turned up, as well as my own sisters. Greta's family went into the house – unhappily, it must be admitted – but my own relations couldn't bring themselves to darken the door. Instead, they stood at the corner of the street, where a crowd of two to three hundred had begun to gather.

In the downstairs bedroom, Fr O'Donnell prepared for the Mass. I helped him with his robes and in arranging the altar. He was a little nervous.

'This is no ordinary Mass I am about to perform, John. But then you

already know that. I had to ask permission from St Paul's, your local parish.'

'Don't talk to me about those...' I had to take a deep breath to control myself. I was still angered at the way I had been treated by the priests from St Paul's. They had consistently refused to become involved with me, my family or the house. Because of the way they had ignored our plight I had decided that I would never go to St Paul's chapel again.

I settled for saying as gently as I could: 'I think they were petrified of the house, Father.'

'Aye,' he remarked. 'You know, they've handed over all responsibility to me.'

I couldn't say anything, I was so choked with rage. Fr O'Donnell, an old man with a heart of gold, and St Paul's didn't care what happened to him. As far as they were concerned he was on his own.

The Mass went well. Fr O'Donnell blessed the crowd and a few people remarked how they felt so much better. Afterwards a few of the neighbours approached me to let me know that they had lifted a collection round the estate. Greta and I were very impressed by this spontaneous act of generosity, but we decided not to accept it. We thanked those neighbours who had come up with the idea and suggested that Fr O'Donnell should take it, because he had nothing. He couldn't afford new clothes or footwear. At first he wouldn't hear of this, but we talked him round and in the end he accepted it with gratitude.

Later, as he was packing to leave, he asked me a strange question: 'Now that you are out of the house, is there anything strange happening to you?'

I replied, 'No. All things considered I have been feelin' a lot better. Just gettin' out of the house is big relief, Father. There's only one thing – and it's hardly worth even mèntionin' considerin' what we've all gone through.'

'What is it?'

I hesitated before I answered. Even though I knew that Fr O'Donnell was on my side, it still embarrassed me to talk about things like this. 'I've been havin' a terrible lot of dreams lately, Father.'

'Bad, are they?'

'Terrible! I wake up sweatin'. Afraid that I'm going to find myself back in the house, with – with you-know-who.'

He nodded at this, but didn't look as if he was going to speak out what was on his mind. I said, 'Have you any reason for askin'?'

'Well, there's one thing to consider, John, and I don't like to bring it up. I'm just glad to hear that there have been no unnatural events outside the house. Because you know what that would mean, don't you?'

I nodded, reluctant to think too long on the subject. I said hoarsely, 'It would mean that it wasn't the house the woman wanted – it was me.'

Fr O'Donnell sighed and put a hand on my shoulder. 'And what could we do to help you if that were the case?'

*What could be done if that were the case?* This idea hadn't occurred to me before. The thought that this woman would leave the house to follow me was terrifying.

'Thank God,' Fr O'Donnell continued. 'You have to expect dreams after the things that you and Greta have gone through. Keep an eye on Greta,' he added, 'she's sure to have dreams too.'

'Too right, Father,' I said, 'she means too much to me to neglect her in any way.'

'I know that, John,' he said, smiling. 'And never forget that you are in my prayers night and day.'

'Thanks, Father. We'll keep in touch.'

When Fr O'Donnell left, I was glad to join the gathering. It was time to lock up and leave. Despite the recent Mass, the house still had an atmosphere: I had the sensation of being watched, although I didn't mention this to anybody. They were nervous enough as it was. If I had come out and said this, there would have been a stampede for the door. In

fact, because I was always the target of the woman's attacks, I knew that everybody kept an eye on me. If they saw me looking scared, then they knew that the woman was approaching. I was like an early warning system for them.

## Chapter 8 Showdown!

The next day we contacted an official from the Housing Executive in order to apply for a transfer away from the area. We wanted to give our kids a new life somewhere else where they could forget what had happened.

When the man from the Housing Executive arrived we recognised him as someone we'd had dealings with before. He commented on how much we had changed.

'You'll understand why,' I said, 'when you hear what we've got to tell you.'

After I gave him an account of events in the house, he looked as if he didn't believe us. I knew it was hard to believe on just my word alone, so I invited him down to the house. He refused to go – but he expected my family to live there!

Since he didn't believe us, he advised us to apply for the transfer on medical grounds such as stress.

'You'll need letters,' he said, 'from your family doctor and your social workers. And since this priest has also been called in, you'll need a letter from Fr O'Donnell.'

'What would Fr O'Donnell have to write in his letter?' I asked.

'He would have to explain why you are having problems with the house and why he has had to say a Mass in the living room.'

'That's impossible,' I said. 'You can't ask a priest to commit himself in writing on a subject like that. There's a ruling inside the Church about

talking about that sort of thing. Fr O'Donnell doesn't want to be in the middle of a controversy, he just helped us out when there was nobody else even prepared to look the road we were on.'

'You're in an impossible situation, then,' said the man from the Housing Executive. 'You've got a perfectly good house that you won't live in. How do you expect us to re-allocate you a new house if you won't live in this one?'

When he left, Greta and I were in no doubt that we had a fight on our hands to be rehoused. A fight that, if anything, would probably be harder than the one we had undergone in the house.

Later that day, a local radio station got in touch with me, concerning an interview about the house. I agreed because after my conversation with the Housing Executive official I knew that any help we could get would be more than welcome.

The interview was recorded over the phone as I did not feel up to going to the radio station. I was asked to tell a few of my experiences. Among the incidents I mentioned was my being thrown over the bannister and beaten about the head. The radio people appeared to be very interested and said they would broadcast it on the following day on a chat show.

At last, I thought, someone was going to take our situation seriously.

By now the children were feeling another pressure. We had left all of our belongings and most of their clothes in the house. The children didn't want these clothes because they knew that the presence had strewn them all over the house on various occasions. I couldn't blame them. After all, who would want to touch, let alone wear, anything that had been handled by that thing.

Greta didn't want anything out of the house. All the furniture that we had gathered over seventeen years of marriage was now lost to us because of the bad memories it would raise.

The next day in Danny and Sandra's house, we prepared to listen to my

interview on Barry Cowan's programme on the radio which was due to be broadcast around midday. When it came on the air, we all listened carefully to everything that was broadcast.

Danny and Sandra thought that it was very interesting. Greta just sat and stared at the radio. She found it hard to believe that she was listening to me talking about our house. It was just another horror added to the other horrors that she'd already endured.

When my part was ended, a caller rang in, an expert in this sort of thing. She introduced herself as Mrs Sheila St Clair, and she said that she could sympathise with what we had gone through. She gave a phone number for us to contact her whenever we needed advice.

Greta phoned her and Mrs St Clair strongly advised her to keep anyone under the age of eighteen out of the house.

'And, just as important,' she added, 'for everyone else to keep away.'

'But it's our home,' objected Greta. 'We were hopin' to find some way of gettin' this thing out of the house so we can go back and live there.'

'It won't be easy,' said Mrs St Clair. 'This thing has enormous potential violence in it. It could even turn to starting fires, if you really start pressing it.'

'Oh my God,' said Greta, 'don't be sayin' things like that. Is there no end to what we have to put up with?'

'Perhaps,' said Mrs St Clair, 'if I could arrange to see you. I happen to know a psychic medium and a few other people who might be able to help.'

'We've had a priest of our own in,' said Greta, 'but he hasn't been able to help.'

'This medium is very experienced, and if anybody can help you, I'm sure that he can.'

An arrangement was made over the phone for Greta to meet Mrs St Clair and her friends. When she came off the phone, Greta said, 'Well, we've tried a priest and we've had the house blessed, and now we're steppin' over the fence, for this medium is a Protestant minister!'

'If he can help,' I said, 'then more power to his elbow.'

I didn't go to the meeting with Greta. People had told me that mediums were the sort of people who could see through you and I wasn't ready for anything like that at the moment. Sandra and Margaret went along with Greta to keep her company, and when they got there they found out that the meeting was at the back of a Baptist Church.

Greta found them very pleasant and helpful. She met Mrs St Clair face to face, and found her to be a soft-spoken lady with grey hair and glasses. Mrs St Clair introduced a tallish man, very well dressed, who spoke in a low, confident voice.

'This is Cecil,' said Mrs St Clair, 'he's a psychic medium.' ('Cecil' is not his real name, but is used in order to preserve his privacy.)

As they asked her questions, they taped the whole interview. After discussing the house, the talked ranged over into general topics.

Then Cecil shocked Greta by telling her: 'There are two people, one on each side of you, protecting you.' When he told her a name, Greta recognised it. The name was Maurice Buckley and the only person of that name that Greta had ever known was a man she used to run messages for almost thirty years before. Greta had not seen him since she was a child and she knew that he was now dead and buried. The other was Frank McCabe, her sister Ann's brother-in-law. He had died in England a few years previously. The link with him was so tenuous that Great was sure that if she were to meet him in the street she would never have recognised him. And Cecil was able to tell her details such as this.

When Greta told me about this later, she said, 'Y'know, the funny thing is, I wasn't frightened. It gave me a wee bit of confidence.'

'Well, I'm glad that I didn't go,' I said, 'for God knows what he might have seen hovering over me!'

Cecil agreed to visit the house with a few other people.

'If it's a lost soul or a wandering spirit,' he said, 'then there's a chance that I can help it to find its way back to the light.'

Greta arranged for them to come to the house on the following Thursday. 'You know,' she said, 'that you'll be on your own. John and I have decided that we're never going to go back into that house. Or if we are, then we have to know for certain that there's nothing in it ready to pounce on us the minute we go in.'

'With good fortune,' said Cecil, 'perhaps we'll be instrumental in bringing that about.'

When Greta, Sandra and Margaret returned from this meeting, Ta said, 'Sure I'll go in along with them. There's a mate of mine who's heard all the rumours and he wants to go into the house.

So it was arranged that Cecil, with four ladies, Ta and his friend should enter the house around about 10 o'clock that Thursday night and spend most of the night there.

Greta and I were concerned for them. As I said to her, 'We know the things that woman is capable of.'

Greta replied, 'Our only hope, John, is that if you're not there, then maybe she won't get so violent.'

'But,' I objected, 'what about all the noises in the house when there's nobody there? Sure the lights are goin' on and off and there's not even electricity switched on inside.'

'What's that?' said Ta.

'Did you not realise that, Ta?' I asked. 'With us out of the house, the electric's off.'

'I knew about it,' said Ta, looking worried. 'But I never really made the connection. We'll be in the house in the dark.'

'You don't have to go with them,' I said. 'Let this medium go in, if he's so dead set on goin'. You're going to be usin' candles. It's just not on, if you ask me. She was bad enough when we had the lights on, what's she goin' to be like in that sort of atmosphere?'

Ta wavered for a few days, but when he thought it over, he decided to go ahead.

That day Greta and I called over to see our next door neighbours Barney and Sadie. 'We're just droppin' by,' I said, 'to let you know what's going to happen. If you should hear any noises, then there will be people in the house.

But they had bad news for us. Barney had a very stocky build and he was always red in the face. His manner was that he always sounded as if he was shouting at you, but this was just his way, and we had grown close over the few years we had been neighbours.

'Last night was very noisy, John,' said Barney. 'Doors were banged into the early hours and the lights flashed on and off.'

'But, sure, the electricity's off,' I said.

'You know that, and I know that,' said Barney, 'but does *she* know that? And then there's always a lot of strange noises coming out of it at odd hours.'

'I just hope,' said Greta, 'that this man knows what he's gettin' himself into. I wish he wouldn't go ahead, but he's all for it.'

'He thinks this is a lost soul,' I told Barney and Sadie.

'It's not,' said Barney, with the sort of conviction that comes only from experience. 'It's worse than that. It's something far more serious. It's evil. Can you not feel it?'

I said nothing, but I had a gut-feeling that this was no namby-pamby ghost. If that's all it was, then Fr O'Donnell would have been able to lay it for us.

We were in Danny's house, when Cecil and three colleagues arrived. His three colleagues were ladies from Tyrone (to judge by their accents). I was introduced to them but there was so much going on at the time that I don't remember their names. They were very interested in me, and asked me all about the house and what I had gone through. I saw the interest in their eyes as I spoke. Cecil stared at me. I was hoping that he wouldn't see anything or anybody beside me as he had seen with Greta. If he did see something, then he never spoke about it. I think he knew not to say

anything because I couldn't have taken it.

The others kept asking me to describe the woman in black and how she looked when she was beating me. Then they looked at each other and stopped: they could tell that it was disturbing me.

Shortly after that they prepared to go. Greta and I kept telling them to be very careful. At the first sign of anything strange, we advised them to get out. While they were gone, Greta and I sat on tenterhooks, worried about what would transpire.

We waited up for them and in the early hours Ta returned. He had come away before the rest of them because he had work to go to. He described what had happened.

'Well,' said Ta, 'we went in and we lit candles and set them up all around the house. Then we sat down to wait. After an hour or so, we began to hear the sound of a baby crying. It seemed to be coming from upstairs. We didn't go up to look around right away, but Cecil made us all wait until everybody was sure that we all could hear it. So we got up and went upstairs.

'As we climbed the stairs, the baby's crying seemed to get louder.'

Cecil later confided in me about the events of that night. He said that as he walked up the stairs he encountered some sort of psychic barrier that prevented him from passing the third or fourth step. He prayed and found the strength to go on and the barrier weakened and let him through.

Ta continued, 'Then Cecil went into one of the bedrooms, and it stopped.

'This went on for most of the night,' finished Ta.

'A baby cryin'?' said Greta, bewildered.

'Maybe there's more to this than meets the eye,' I admitted. 'Maybe the power this woman has is some sort of perverted mother's love. I don't like to admit that a ghost could have disrupted us as easily as this, but if she's got some sort of bee in her bonnet about a cryin' baby, then that might explain a lot.'

A strange twist in an already strange saga!

It set me thinking. It had never been my experience to hear a child crying in the house, but it reminded me of something else that had occurred. At face value it doesn't mean very much, but with the background of the events so far, perhaps there was some sort of rhyme and reason to this whole episode after all.

One of my neighbours had given us a prayer book – one of the many things brought to the house during the early days of our ordeal. I can't remember now which one of my neighbours gave it in, but it sat on the mantelpiece for a long time. It had the uncanny habit of always being found open at the same page – a page that held a prayer for expectant mothers. At first this had been considered a coincidence, but then it happened time after time. Then people saw it open by itself, and the pages would turn until this prayer was reached.

Was this woman trying to tell us something? Had an event occurred on this site, possibly even before this house was built, that involved a woman expecting a baby? If so, what could I do about it? It was something that would have to be given careful thought.

The next day I met Cecil again.

'This is a fascinating house,' he said. 'There's a psychic atmosphere here, but I don't think it's one of evil.'

'I'm glad to hear that,' I said fervently.

He was interested to hear the account of the prayer book. 'This could well be the key to your problem, John. If it's convenient for you, I'd like to spend another night in the house. I intend to call on the woman in black and send her back to where she came from.'

'Are you sure you really want to go through with this?'

'When I'm ready,' he said, 'I'll let you know.'

For the next few days, Greta and I were subjected to another kind of nightmare. Things were becoming very difficult. We had begun to feel

that we had imposed on our friends for far too long. Our respective families seemed to have forgotten our existence. We had rung them a few times, asking them to take in one or other of the kids for a while, but we always got fobbed off with the same empty excuses.

The younger children had become very clingy and didn't want to leave our side. They couldn't understand what was happening. They could see their friends living a happy secure life and this upset to family life was beginning to affect them. You could see the tears in their eyes sometimes. Our hearts went out to them.

Greta especially was affected terribly. She took crying fits during which she cursed the thing in our house. Seeing my family fall apart like this was beginning to make me very angry. I fell into spells of depression when I could see no way out for my wife or family and no end to this present situation. I wanted to do something to protect them, but I didn't know how to go about it.

A few nights later, it came to a head.

We were in Danny's house. The kids had watched TV all night and then it came time for them to go to bed. It had come to the stage where they would only go to bed if I tucked them in for the night. About an hour after that, Greta and I said our goodnights and made our way to Ta and Margaret's house.

We found Ta still up, watching television, so Greta and I sat down to talk with him. Naturally the subject ended up about our house.

As we talked I began to get worked up. I began to call the woman in black all sorts of names because she had wrecked my life. Then out of the blue I said to Ta:

'Will you come down to the house with me?'

'What do you mean?' asked Ta, startled.

'I want to fight this woman! I have decided,' I said angrily, 'that she is not going to keep me out of my house.'

'Calm down, John,' said Ta, 'you don't want to go anywhere near her at this time of night. And certainly not when you've got your temper up

like this.'

I got up. 'Well, I'm goin', Ta. If you don't want to come along, then that's fine by me.'

'Are you really goin'?' he asked.

'I am.'

He sighed and got up. 'Okay, you talked me into it. Like, I think your head's cut, but I don't want you goin' into that house on your own. I wouldn't have it on my conscience.'

'Well, here,' said Greta, when she saw what way it was going, 'if yous two are goin', then I'm not sittin' here worryin' about what's goin' to happen to yous.'

'You can just keep out of this,' I said. 'This is between me and *her*, and I'm goin' to straighten it out once and for all.'

'You can't stop me,' said Greta. 'Sure, amn't I the only one who can keep her off you?'

'This is a real showdown,' I said. 'This is a grudge fight, Greta. I don't want you there.'

Greta got up and put on her coat. 'Well, you're goin' to have to like it or lump it, because I'm going.'

'Okay, okay,' I snapped, 'so you're goin'! Let's get on our way!'

As we set off, the closer I came to the house, the more nervous I became. Greta sensed this and as we passed the house of our next door neighbours, she suggested:

'Why don't we stop in and have a wee word with Barney and Sadie? They can tell us what the house has been like tonight so far.'

'Aye, okay,' I said. 'Besides, their light's still on, so they must still be up.'

Barney and two of his sons were in when we called.

'I'm fed up with this, Barney,' I told him, 'I'm goin' in to have it out with her once and for all.'

Barney looked at our tense faces and knew he couldn't talk us out of it. 'Well, since you dropped by,' he said, 'sure, me and the boys can just

come along. That'll make six of us, five more and we could have a football team.'

'Thanks, Barney. You're a pal.'

Despite my anger and nerves, I now felt a lot safer.

We entered the house and closed the door behind us. After we lit candles we sat down in the living room. Barney positioned himself on the sofa beside me with his sons on the other side of me. I could feel that they were ready to help me out if they had to. Barney lit up a cigarette and said:

'I never thought I'd see you back in here, John. Not after what you've been put through.'

'What else can we do, Barney? This is our home. We're not nomads. We can't just uproot ourselves and go somewhere else. The Housing Executive don't believe us, so we've not even got an entitlement to live anywhere else. It's like havin' to live in Sherwood Forest with Robin Hood and his Merrie Men. You can only do it for so long. After a week it's not funny.'

'Well,' said Barney, 'there's nowhere like your own hearth and home.'

As we smoked and talked, I noticed that the house had lost its atmosphere. I couldn't sense any strangeness about it and I mentioned this to Greta, who agreed with me. After a while we began to relax and Ta even cracked a few jokes.

'Wouldn't it be great,' I said, 'if she was finally gone. There's none of that sensation of cold, even though the house has been empty for weeks.'

Everything was calm. Barney reached forward to the ashtray to stub out his cigarette.

Suddenly, I knew she had come back. She had merely been waiting her chance to get at me. Before I could dodge, she grabbed me by the side of the head and smashed me off the wall.

It took the others a few seconds before they were able to put their arms around me and get her away. My head was spinning from the pain. I could see only blackness. As the pain of her blows faded, my sight returned in

time to see her walk back out into the hall. This was just the opening of hostilities. It was her way of letting me know that she was far from finished with me. She paused and looked back into the room, as if deciding whether to come back or not. With her blocking this door, there was no means of getting out of the house.

Suddenly the room was plunged into coldness. 'She's in the room!' I shouted, 'but she's keeping herself hidden from me. Help me, help me.'

Barney and Ta cried out, 'I can feel her coldness – she's passing this way!'

Greta shouted, 'She's just swept right past!'

Barney's two sons grabbed hold of me, placing cushions behind my head for protection. Because her usual target, my head, was barred from her, she grabbed my ankle instead and began to haul me off the sofa. Greta and the others all climbed on top of me in an effort to hold me down. Even so we began to be dragged towards the door – five men and a woman! – and this thing had strength enough to move all of us.

As I was dragged towards the door, I thought, *Oh God, where is she taking me!* The strength of the grip she had on my foot was beyond belief. Her grasp was like a vice!

Then to my relief she let go.

Nobody needed to say anything. They all surrounded me like a rugby scrum and we edged our way out to the front door. As we moved I said:

'She's standing there, watching us. She knows she's won.'

She had succeeded in putting us out of our home.

When we went over to Barney's son's house across the street, I checked my ankle. There, for all to see, was the mark of her hand. Her grip had been so fierce that it had almost broken the skin.

Greta said: 'For a minute, it was like an all-in tag-team wrestling match in there. Y'know, that woman had used your foot as a weapon. She lifted it up and then let it drop full force onto my foot.'

When she examined herself for injury, she discovered that her toe was badly damaged.

After that night, a scary silence fell over the house. People were once again filled with fear. They had started to tell themselves that this thing had gone, but now they were back to their sleepless nights.

Some local men weren't allowed out of the house by wives who were terrified to be left alone. Children asked for their parents to sleep with them. The presence of the woman in black had spread beyond our house into the whole neighbourhood.

I had no regrets about going back to the house. There was something to get off my chest and I had acted on that impulse. I was frightened, true, but now I knew what awaited me if I were to ever return to the house again.

## Chapter 9 Furniture & Vodka

The following day, Greta and I called in on Barney to see how he was faring. He had a history of heart trouble and we were concerned for his health after the shock he had received last night. We found him with a bad colour, very pale and shaken. Sadie was there, and she was feeling jumpy too.

Barney said, 'There were noises in the house after we left. It just didn't let up the whole night long.'

While Barney was telling us this, a neighbour called in and became interested in the conversation. The neighbour said:

'If I were yous I'd get someone to go in and check on the house and its contents.'

'Well, there's no way I'm goin' in,' I said.

'That's a good idea,' said Greta.

'I thought you had given up on the furniture and contents because of the taint from the woman.'

'I had,' she said, 'but it makes me furious the thought of her just doin' what she likes with it.'

Sadie said, 'Well, if you want someone to go in with you, look no further. I don't mind goin' in while it's broad daylight.'

'Thanks very much,' said Greta, 'that's very good of you.'

'Well, if you two are goin' in,' said Wilma, 'I'll go along with yous.'

When they went in the first thing they noticed was the furniture in the

living room. 'It was lying all over the place,' Greta told me later. 'Chairs were upside down, pictures and ornaments were scattered all around.'

Barney and I stayed out in the street and peered in through the window. We were amazed. It was as if the woman had been in a temper and had thrown the furniture about in a fit of rage. Barney's son joined us, but after his experience of the night before, he was none too keen to go in either.

Greta and the others opened the window to tell us that they had decided to go upstairs and check.

'Be careful,' I warned. 'You know how quick she is when she attacks.'

'We'll be all right,' said Greta, 'so long as you don't come in.'

'Well, you've no worry on that score,' I said. 'I'm out on the street, and I'm plannin' to stay here.'

They made their way up the stairs, being very cautious about it, peeping through the bannisters as they went. They could see into the bedrooms, and called down to us that the beds had been pulled together into the centre of each room. Then they shouted down that they were going up onto the landing.

Then they started to scream. Barney and his son dashed up the stairs, shouting at me to stay where I was. Once Barney and his son reached them, the women settled down a little. I made my way into the hall and called up:

'What is it? What happened?'

Greta's face appeared over the bannister. 'I looked into the first bedroom, and I saw the shape of someone lying on top of the bed even though there was nothing there.'

'Is that what made yous all scream?' I asked.

'No, it was not!' said Greta. 'When we went over to it, the shape moved as if whatever was making it had sat up and walked away.'

'Is *that* what made you scream?'

'No,' said Greta. 'As it passed us, we could feel its coldness.'

'And that's what made you scream,' I said.

'Not really,' she admitted. 'It was all three things put together.'

'That thing was sitting on the bed for a purpose, y'know, ' I told her. 'It can make itself invisible, and if it doesn't want you to know it's there, then you'll never know it. It had a point to make.'

I didn't say it, but I thought: *And the point is this: I'm here to stay.*

From my vantage in the hall, I was able to see them in the bedroom. After their initial fright, they were growing angry towards the woman. To show their defiance of her, they decided to move the beds back to their proper places in each bedroom. When this was done, they came downstairs and put it all back into order – again as a means of thumbing our nose at her.

As I stood and looked on at all of this industry, I became aware of a cold breeze coming down the stairs. Although I couldn't see her, I knew this was the woman in black, coming down as if she was the lady of the house, to assert her ownership. I shouted a warning to the others then jumped back out into the street, away from her influence.

The others had already sensed her coming and they managed to make it into the hall before she could reach them. She may have regained control of the house, but her victory was a hollow one. Between them the three women had managed to put back every stick of furniture the way it should be.

After that run in with her, we decided to leave the house alone for a few days.

Barney was looking better now that he had seen the house in daylight. He said, 'I'll keep an eye on the house for yous. I'll just juke in every so often – with the sons to back me up! – just to make sure that nothing else has been moved.'

Pressure was growing on another front. Danny now had four of our children living with him and Sandra. Although he never complained, I knew that we were in his way. The house was small and on a wet day we would all be crushed into the tiny living room. As well as this, Greta had to try to feed them all. The kids were missing a settled home life and Greta

and I longed for something that would help us out of this predicament. All we wanted was our family back together again with a normal home.

As an example of how bad things were: it was not unusual for us to take the kids for a walk up to the local leisure centre. There we would sit on the grass while one or other of the kids would be sent to the local chip shop for a carry out. It was a terrible feeling to sit there and watch my kids eating their supper out of paper in the open air. Greta was often reduced to tears, and I was never far from crying myself.

On other days we would use the seats in the local shopping centre. We would sit there for hours, feeling miserable and left out. I was aware of Greta watching other people doing their shopping. We could see families out together: sisters shopping for pleasure, wives with their husbands, laughing and joking with their kids.

I knew that Greta was missing the company of her own sisters. Once they had been very close, but now she felt left out in the cold. She was alone and helpless: she had no home, her kids were walking the streets, a spectacle for everyone to see, but no-one was willing to pull her out of her nightmare.

Around this time a local newspaper approached us. Two journalists wanted to spend a night in the house along with a photographer to see if they could get a story out of it.

Greta said, 'It might be worth it for the publicity. We need to put pressure on the Housing Executive. This might help us.'

'You're right,' I said. 'We need to get them to take our case seriously.'

Greta and I agreed to let the reporters stay in the house on a Thursday night. Two men and a woman were due to arrive at 9.30 pm. As things turned out, they didn't show up until eleven o'clock, when we got a message from Barney to tell us that they were in the house. Greta, Sandra and I decided to go down to make sure that everything was all right. Things had a wrong feeling to them, so weren't entirely surprised when we reached the house, to find that the reporters were drunk.

It was going to be useless. How could they do a story in this state. They were supposed to spend the night in the house to see what was going to happen.

They invited us in for a few minutes. We went in but I said, 'What's the point in comin' to do a story when you're in no condition to write?'

'Oh, never worry, we'll have no problem writing it,' said one.

I didn't like their attitude about this whole business.

'Why don't you go upstairs?' said another, with a smirk.

'You just want to see somethin' happen, don't you?' I asked angrily.

'That's what we're here for,' they said. They weren't taking this seriously at all. All they wanted was a quick story. We left before I said something that I knew I would regret.

When we went back to the house to check up on its condition, we found the living room in a terrible mess. There were empty vodka bottles lying around the room and empty glasses all over the place. What was even more upsetting was the fact that Holy Pictures had been taken off the walls and left face down on the floors. As well as that, Greta's asthma tablets were sprinkled all over the bedroom floor.

These journalists were supposed to be responsible people with the job of writing a story. We were banking on them to help us prove our case to the Housing Executive.

Some people suggested that perhaps the thing in the house had caused the mess. This didn't sound right to me, but I knew that if I challenged the journalists about it then they would no doubt deny responsibility. The whole episode had been a farce and a waste of time. All the same I dreaded what they would print.

The following night the neighbours were kept awake for most of the night by the strange noises that came from the house. It was the usual repertoire of slamming doors and pounding footsteps from upstairs. The woman in black had done it to me again. When I tried to bring her out into the open to prove her existence, she had failed to show. Then, as if to gloat, she would start to torture the neighbours. Was she playing some kind of

game? If so, it was a game that she would always win, for she wrote the rules to suit herself.

The Saturday after the reporters, Greta and I found a little relief and space to ourselves. Since the kids had come to stay with in their house, Danny and Sandra had fallen into a routine of going over to Danny's father for the day. This meant that Greta and I had the free run of the house, and this was usually the only day of the week when we had the children all to ourselves.

On this day, Greta could start to feel like a wife and mother once again, for she could get the children showered and freshened up. For these few hours it was as if we were a family again, united under our own roof. The difference in Greta was tremendous: she was relaxed and cheerful, and the children and I loved every minute of it. We could imagine what it would be like to get back to a place we could call home.

Then, before we knew it, Danny and Sandra would return, and we would be brought back to earth with a bump. Greta's face would fall, and she would return to her depressed mood. The kids would change: they would pick fights over stupid things. And it would all end with either Greta or me shouting at them.

The situation was intolerable. It made everyone tense, including Danny and Sandra, who were starting to get edgy with each other. We felt sorry for them. They were a young couple with a young child of their own and their life had been going along quite pleasantly until they had fallen under the burden of the seven of us. It was bound to tell sooner or later, and the situation was coming to a boiling point.

We weren't the only ones who needed time on our own. Danny and Sandra were feeling crowded, and we knew that we would have to find somewhere else to stay. But we didn't know what to do. We had nowhere to go. There was no chance of anyone taking in a family of seven. We were facing another crisis.

## Chapter 10 Crisis...

My fears about the journalists were proved right. They hadn't taken the thing seriously, and their article was a load of nonsense. They wrote about how they had stayed up the whole night without hearing or seeing anything. I knew they had been drunk and had probably slept most of the night. They just made a laugh of the whole thing. And what was worse, they had made my fight for a new house all the harder.

Greta was furious. She wanted to approach another newspaper and ask them to print the truth and expose the behaviour of the reporters. I was against this, because I felt that a confrontation with the paper concerned was the last thing we needed. We had enough on our plate right now, fighting the Housing Executive and coping with the pressure of sharing Danny's house.

We were still taking the children for walks to get them out of people's way. We would just start walking, with no destination in mind, something I wouldn't wish on anyone. The younger kids especially found the long walks hard going, mainly because it was difficult to explain to them that we had to give Danny and Sandra some time on their own. This regime was beginning to take its toll on the children's health. They were looking pale and had begun to lose weight. Worried about this new development, Greta and I took them to see the doctor. The doctor confirmed that the way we were living was having a detrimental effect on them. More than that, they were having restless nights. The events that had occurred in their house

were still playing on their minds.

John, our oldest boy, had broken out in a nervous rash. He had been staying with Jim and Martine in a house that was quite near to our house and we felt that he was still within the woman's sphere of influence. Although Jim and Martine couldn't have treated John any better, it was still taking a nervous toll on their health. John himself was so nervous he he was now suffering from a speech impediment. We were going to have to bring John back to himself, but it would take us a long time to get his confidence back. Indeed, we knew that all of our children were going to need a lot of attention, but with things being the way they were, it was impossible for them get the attention they deserved.

Cecil the medium contacted us again, dropping in to see us that evening in Margaret's house.

'I just called by to see how you are faring,' he said, 'and to see if anything else has been learned about the house.'

We quickly brought him up to date on the poltergeist activity of the moving furniture, and also the sorry tale of the newspaper reporters.

'I'm surprised you haven't been re-housed.'

That was another sorry tale, so we asked him if he was going to spend another night in the house.

'I have no immediate plans,' he said. 'I don't think that there is anything to be accomplished that way.'

He was interested in our welfare. He had brought along a friend, Ann, to meet us. Ann was in her mid-thirties, of medium build with blonde hair. She spoke in a quiet confident manner and always seemed to be filled with genuine concern for us. She watched Greta with worry, and remarked that she didn't look too well.

She said that Greta ought to watch her health otherwise she would end up in hospital. Greta suffers from asthma, but I was pleased that she had weathered the experience in the house reasonably well. This night, however, she was having difficulty with her breathing.

As Ann and Cecil left, Ann repeated her warning to Greta about her health.

Later in bed that night, Greta's condition worsened. She had turned almost blue in the face because she couldn't breathe properly. I brought her downstairs where she could be made more comfortable. Each time she tried to breathe she gasped and turned almost black.

When Margaret saw the state that she was in she phoned for an ambulance to take her to hospital. I went with Greta in the ambulance and saw that she was getting worse with every breath. Then they put the oxygen mask on her. Greta held my hand and stared up at me, her eyes almost bursting out of her head. All the pressure of the past month or so was finally catching up with her. She had coped as best she could, but it had meant hiding a lot of her feelings, bottling them up inside.

I was helpless. All I could do was sit and watch. She had always been there for me when I needed her, and now there was nothing that I could do for her in return.

When we got to the hospital, Greta was rushed in and given an injection to help her to breathe. I had to wait outside until they examined her. After a wait of what seemed like hours, I heard my name being called over the intercom. At last I could see her.

She looked a lot better now with the medicine beginning to take effect. The doctor said:

'I'm afraid she'll have to stay in. This is an extremely serious asthma attack and she will have to be watched during the night.'

Greta asked me to stay with her. I knew she was terrified at the thought of being alone during the night. I asked permission to go with Greta to the ward, where I could talk to the night sister. The sister came out to see me and told me that she had recognized my name and address and said that she had heard about my house from the papers and television.

After I described my experiences enough to make her shiver, she agreed to let me stay with Greta until the morning.

I knew that the fear of being left alone would have brought on another

asthma attack – one that could prove to be fatal. All I could do was sit beside her and hold her hand, urging her to sleep.

Sleep was the last thing Greta wanted, because she was afraid that I would go away and leave her if she closed her eyes.

It was now around 2.30 in the morning and the ward was very quiet. The lights were all turned down low, the old people in the ward were making groaning noises and in my nervous state of mind I thought of the house. It was very eerie. My mind started to play tricks with me, as I stared into the darkness. I began to imagine that shadows were moving furtively about. I made an effort and pushed it out of my mind. I had more important things to worry about.

I sat on for a while and then went out for a smoke. To keep Greta's mind at peace to let her know I would return I left my jacket over the chair beside her bed.

Outside, I felt very alone.

All I could think of was that my world was caving in all around me. I stared at the ceiling in a sort of daze. To snap myself out of this mood, I made a few phone calls.

The first call was to my sister, Mary. When I told her what had happened I got the feeling that she wasn't paying attention to my problems. This made me feel even more depressed. My second call was to Greta's sister, Joan. Her response was more sympathetic and she said that she would come immediately to see Greta.

She arrived after about half an hour and her concern was obvious when she saw Greta still with the oxygen mask on and still fighting for breath. Greta perked up a little when she saw Joan, for she had begun to feel that no-one cared anything about her. After Joan left, I settled down beside Greta in an effort to encourage her to sleep.

The night slowly wore on and gradually the ward began to show signs of coming to life. The nurses prepared to change shifts, getting things ready to hand over to their fellows.

About 9.30, a doctor came to see Greta and decided to move her to

another ward. I told Greta I would be back in an hour – I wanted to get home and see the kids and let them know that their mother was all right. Greta also needed a change of clothes for the hospital, and I had a few errands of that nature to carry out.

When I got back to the hospital that afternoon, some of Greta's family were there. Greta was very depressed. She had been crying and she was trying to sign herself out. Her two sisters didn't help much. They just sat and talked among themselves, completely ignoring Greta. I don't know why they came to see her if that was the way they were going to act. They probably only came to see her to keep up appearances.

I tried to calm her down, but she was in hysterics, and the doctor had to come and talk to her. When I came back to see her that night, my own sister was with her. She had come to get me to go with her to her house that night after I left Greta. I hadn't slept the night before and was beginning to feel it. Greta agreed that I should go to my sister's, but I wanted to stay with Greta for as long as I could. If I could get her to calm down, then her breathing would improve.

I left long after the other visitors. Greta was in good form, sitting up, and her whole mood changed. I felt a lot better as I left her and she didn't seem to mind me going. She agreed to get some sleep. The sooner she relaxed, the sooner she would get out.

When I got to my sister's about 11.30, I just dropped into a chair. I was almost sleeping on my feet. My sister prepared me a meal and as I was getting ready for bed, the phone range. It was Greta, ringing to tell me that she had signed herself out of the hospital. I couldn't understand why, because I had left her in such a cheerful frame of mind.

Soon the door was knocked and there was Greta! She had taken a taxi. She was still dressed in her hospital clothes and dressing gown.

I knew that something serious had happened to make her leave the hospital at that time of night, and dressed as she was. We brought her in and she told us what had happened.

She said that after I had left her, she had dozed. After a while she heard

voices coming from the top of the ward. She recognized the nurses and the doctor talking among themselves. Greta heard her name being mentioned and the fact that she lived in a so-called haunted house. At first she didn't mind being discussed, because people were always curious about the house and she had gradually become used to it.

But then odd things began to happen. The voices spread themselves around the ward and began to make strange noises. She could hear them walking about her bed, standing at the head of it and opening and closing books, rustling papers and whispering among themselves. Then someone would drop something and make a noise at the other side of the ward.

She lay there in complete shock and horror. Then as she sat up the doctor approached. He was dressed all in white. He was even wearing a white hat on his head and white boots on his feet.

Then the nurses burst into a fit of giggles, having a great time at Greta's expense.

Greta then demanded that someone should bring her the forms so she could sign herself out. The doctor brought them and although earlier he had tried to talk her out of leaving the hospital, this time he seemed determined to get her out, even though it meant that she was leaving in the early hours of the morning. Despite the fact that it was very cold and Greta didn't have outdoor clothes, they just let her walk out into the night all alone to find herself a taxi.

When I heard this story, I was in a rage. I grabbed my coat, determined to go back to the hospital for a showdown, but Greta took hold of me and said not to go. My sister also stepped in, saying that we had come through enough and that these people would just deny it and that I would probably end up the guilty party in other people's eyes.

## Chapter 11 ...after Crisis

With Greta out of hospital, we decided to go back that night to Ta and Margaret's house.

Next morning Greta was still having difficulty breathing. I phoned her doctor because I didn't want to take her back to the hospital. When Greta's doctor arrived, she was very angry to hear what had happened at the hospital and she said that she would look into it. She examined Greta, gave her some medication and ordered her to stay in bed.

Margaret put Greta into her own bed and made sure that she was settled in. Even though Greta was still far from well, it was good for her to know that she was back among friends. Margaret was very good to her, making her meals and bringing them up to bed. She even made meals for me so that I could stay near Greta.

The kids dropped in a few times to check up on their mother and they looked a lot happier to see her, because they were very concerned about her being taken to hospital.

Later that day we brought Greta downstairs to watch TV. Margaret lit the fire and it was all very cozy. I even had a few beers and the kids sat with us and we sent out for things for them to eat. After what they had endured, they thought it was great.

As the night wore on, however, I began to feel very down. I was overwhelmed with feelings of hopelessness. I began to feel that things were not going to get better and there was nothing I could do about it. I

felt very depressed and lonely – with nowhere to turn for help.

These feelings might have been prompted by a lack of sleep. Apart from the crisis of Greta being hospitalised, I was chronically short of sleep because of the nightmares I was having. But I'd never felt like this before. Always I'd had the strength to go on and fight. For the first time I felt that I had nothing more to give. I felt finished.

A few weeks before, my doctor had given me tablets to help me relax and sleep. I had never taken them and they had languished in Margaret's bathroom cabinet since then. Now I decided that I really did need these tablets. If I could get some decent sleep then I could face my problems with more resolve.

I took three of the tablets with a glass of water. Three seemed to be a fair number to help me get the relaxation I needed. When I returned to the living room, I neglected to mention to Greta what I had done. My depression had made me uncommunicative.

After about an hour, I still didn't feel any better. I still felt sorry for myself and my mind was all mixed up. Then Ta and Margaret came home. They were in great form and this made me even more depressed. They had been out enjoying themselves, and Greta and I were trapped in this horror story with nowhere to go and no light at the end of the tunnel.

I decided to take another few tablets before we went to bed. I was dreading the thought of lying in bed, thinking my depressing thoughts all night long, or falling asleep and succumbing to another nightmare where I would wake up sweating.

After I went to bed, I knew nothing. What I'm writing now is Greta's version of events.

The next morning Greta woke up with her asthma still causing her suffering. When she looked at me, however, she immediately sensed that there was something wrong. She tried to waken me but there was no response. I was still breathing, but she couldn't waken me, although she said I started snoring which she took to be a good sign.

Then I started to get out of bed to go to the toilet. My eyes were still closed and I couldn't find my feet. I started to fall all over the room as I made my way out to the top of the stairs.

Greta called for help. Margaret heard her and when she saw my condition, she ran next door for Tony, her son-in-law. Tony came in and took me over his shoulder and carried me to the toilet since that was where I was trying to get.

I was still in my underwear. Greta knew that this sort of behaviour was not normal for me. I wouldn't even carry on like this in my own home out of sheer embarrassment.

While Greta got me dressed, Margaret phoned for an ambulance. In all of this confusion, Greta's asthma responded to her adrenalin and allowed her to breath normally.

When I was taken into hospital, Greta phoned my brothers and sisters to tell them the news. They all came over to the hospital to see how I was doing. Some of Greta's family came along as well, so that while I lay unconscious, there were as many as fifteen people around my bed.

Cecil, the psychic medium, also came along with Ann. Since they weren't immediate family they weren't allowed into the ward, but they sat outside, waiting until I would come round.

I slept until around six o'clock. When I woke up I thought I had died. Two ladies, crosses in their hands, were standing over me. They were blessing me and talking about devils and demons. This strange spectacle really upset me. Then they placed the cross on my chest to find out if there would be any strange reactions. Thank God, there wasn't.

When I asked them what they were doing, they explained that they had received a message to go to the hospital to aid me. I thought it was very strange. All I wanted to do was to get up and get out. Most of the people had left, but Cecil and Ann had sat through the whole day, waiting to see me.

They accompanied Greta and I to Margaret's house, where Cecil said he wanted to have a talk with me about why I had taken the pills. After

a while, Cecil came to the conclusion that the dreams about the house were the main problem. He thought that in order to get the dreams to go away I would have to go back to the house for a while. We had to discover whether it was the house the woman wanted or whether it was me. Cecil's attitude was so sympathetic – he was so determined to help me – that I could do nothing else but trust in him.

Finally Cecil said, 'There's no time like the present, John. If you are prepared to help us, then Anne and I will go back with you to the house.'

I looked out of the window. It was eight o'clock of an evening and the sky was still bright.

'The way I feel now, Cecil,' I said, 'I'd do anything to get some peace of mind.'

'So you'll go?' said Cecil.

'Aye, I'll go.'

# Chapter 12 One Last Try

We agreed that the three of us should be the only ones to go in order not to attract attention by bringing a crowd into the house. As we got closer, I could feel my nervousness growing.

Cecil saw my state of nerves and said comfortingly, 'Don't worry, John. You won't be on your own in there.'

Anne smiled encouragement. 'We'll stay by your side at all times – one or other of us will always be right beside you.'

'She's goin' to attack me again,' I said in a wan voice. 'I just know it!'

Cecil put his hand on my shoulder. 'I told you – don't worry,' he said with confidence.

When we entered the house, it was very dark and cold. In the living room Cecil lit some candles and set them on the mantelpiece.

As I looked around, different images sprang to mind. I had often dreamed of being back in the house, but now here I was, actually in it once again.

For a few moments we stood without speaking in the centre of the room. Then the candle flames began to flicker violently.

'She's here!' I said, hoarse with fright.

'That's odd,' said Cecil. 'The temperature hasn't even begun to fluctuate.'

Ann checked around the room. 'And I don't feel any draughts that could be causing it.'

'I don't care,' I insisted. 'She's here. I can tell she's entered the room. She's just not letting me see her for the moment.'

Cecil sat beside me on the sofa. 'Relax,' he said, in a soothing voice. 'Don't get in a panic. If she comes that's good.'

'It is?'

'That's why we're here, isn't it?' said Ann. 'We want to talk to her. We need to communicate with her in order to learn her needs. She's distressed, she's looking for help. And we can help her – help her find her way into the next life. But first we have to learn how to help her.'

'I'm trying, I'm trying,' I said, getting very worked up, 'but it's no use. I can feel her! She's right next to me. I can feel her presence. She's going to start lashing out any minute now!'

I was almost overcome with terror. I wanted to make a dash for the door, but I was frozen to the spot, unable to move.

After a few minutes, I could sense the atmosphere in the room returning to normal. She had gone for the time being, without manifesting herself with her usual violence.

'Thank God,' I thought. 'Maybe I could go now while I was still in one piece.'

Then to my horror, Cecil said, 'We have to go upstairs.'

'Do we have to?' I asked.

Cecil nodded. 'I think if we can get her to show herself, then we can help her.'

'Help her.' I thought of how wicked she had been in the past. I didn't want to go upstairs, but there was no other way out of it. I had come this far, there was no sense backing out now, and if it meant getting rid of her presence...

Ann took a candle from the fireplace and led the way upstairs. I followed, making sure that I was between her and Cecil at all times. Every step up those stairs was torture. My shirt was sticking to my back with the sweat that was running off me. I was wary of the woman's tricks. She had lulled me into a false sense of security in the past, only to turn on me when

I was least expecting it. I knew she was capable of anything and was expecting her to pounce on me any second.

When we reached the top of the stairs, we could see by the way the curtains moved that she had *followed* us upstairs. This scared me, because I had assumed that she had already gone up ahead of us, and here she was sneaking up from behind.

This meant that she had cut off our exit and we had nowhere to run. I kept muttering under my breath, 'God protect me, God protect me.'

At last we reached the landing, where Cecil tried to contact her mentally.

After a few minutes, he said, 'Temperature's dropping. Can you all feel it?'

Ann and I agreed. There was a definite drop in temperature.

The candle that Ann was carrying started to flicker. 'This is something!' she breathed. 'Something's starting to happen!'

I reached out to touch her and found that her hands were as cold as ice, yet in the wan flickering light of the candle her face was flushed as if she was experiencing extreme heat. I gave a startled cry, but Cecil said soothingly:

'Don't worry. That is just Ann's way of making contact with the spirit world. She's going into The Silence. This is interesting. All we experienced the last time we were here was the sound of the baby crying'

'Well,' I said in a strained voice. 'I'm glad you're getting such a kick out of this. Personally, I'm terrified. She's followin' us about to intimidate us. She can follow us anywhere without showing herself just to keep the pressure on us. This coldness is just to test of our nerves.'

Cecil looked at me appraisingly. 'You're in a bit of a state, John. Calm down. Let her come. You've got to let her come and then we can talk to her. Your fear is confusing her. She doesn't like being in this situation any better than you do.'

Ann said, 'Maybe we should go downstairs. John was more comfortable in the living room.'

'Thank God,' I said, 'I feel as if I've been lucky so far, and I don't want to push it.'

We made our way to the head of the stairs, Ann leading with the candle and Cecil bringing up the rear. Halfway down the stairs, there was a thump from behind and Cecil shouted out 'Wait a minute!'

Ann and I turned to see what was happening. Cecil was struggling against a grip that had him by the back of the shirt. Despite his best efforts, he was being pulled backwards up the stairs. It wasn't a violent tug. It was more like an implacable pressure was drawing him back up the stairs. I knew her strength. Cecil had no other option but to follow.

'We have to go back up!' he said. 'She wants us upstairs for some reason.'

I knew what the reason was – me!

'Don't leave me alone with her!' I begged. 'She's getting ready to make her move against me – I can feel it!'

Cecil, fighting every step of the way was forced back upstairs. Ann and I followed, reluctant to leave him in the clutches of that thing. I started praying into myself, fearful of what lay ahead.

We reached the landing where we saw that the bathroom door was opening and closing all by itself. Nobody said anything for a moment, and then Cecil stood up straight, shaking his head in relief.

'I'm free,' he said in a shaky voice. He glanced towards the bathroom door which was still opening and closing, and took a step towards it. Then he stopped and said, 'You two stay here and I'll see what's making this door open and close.'

He turned towards the door, reaching for the handle. The door still continued to open and shut as he made his way up to it, but then just as his hand touched the handle, he stopped.

He said calmly, but urgently , 'Ann! I can't move!'

When Ann moved forward to join him, he said, 'I can't feel anything down one side.' His voice grew more urgent, his words slurred. 'I'm paralysed. It's like a stroke – it only affects one side of my body.'

Ann still had her wits about her. She knew that this was just a ploy to get her and Cecil distracted while the woman in black turned her attentions on me. Despite Cecil's terror, he shouted, 'No, Ann, you can't leave John. I'll have to come over to you!'

For a few seconds we watched as Cecil struggled against his paralysis, then it broke and he was able to move again. He came back to join us, looking shaken, but obviously trying to put on a brave front – for my sake, I suppose.

We stood there for a while on the landing, near the top of the stairs.

Cecil said, 'Well, we've made contact of a sort with her.'

Ann said, 'We can't go downstairs, because she obviously wants us to stay up here.'

She broke off as the curtain on the window began to move of its own accord. It began to shift from side to side as if someone was swinging on it.

'Could we go now?' I asked. 'I've had enough in the way of supernatural manifestations to last me.'

'The woman wants us here for some reason,' said Cecil quietly.

Ann said, 'Let's see how long we can stick it.'

I was sweating with fear. My throat was dry and my heart was banging in my chest – I couldn't take much more of this.

Then I felt a cold draught start up. It blew all around the landing and suddenly she was there – the woman in black. This time, however, instead of looking like a real, three-dimensional person, her image appeared on the wall that faced us. It just showed her from the shoulders up. A strange expression was on her face, one I hadn't seen before, not anger, something less straightforward, hard to put my finger on. She stared at us, as if in wonder.

I said nothing to the others about seeing her. I wanted to see if they could see her too. For too long I had been the only one to actually lay eyes on her. I prayed to God that Cecil and Ann could see her too. I could sense Ann shifting restlessly beside me.

'Don't worry, John,' she said. 'I can see it as well. I know what it is that you're looking at.'

'Oh, yes? Then where is she and what does she look like?'

To my relief she pointed out her position easily and described her exactly, right down to the expression on her face! Ann described it as a sad, solemn sort of expression, one that was looking for help.

Cecil said, 'I can't actually see her, but I can feel that she is nearby.' He tried once again to get her to talk, with no response. She merely stared at us, as the landing got colder.

Despite her apparent tranquillity, I was wary of another trick. I was expecting violence at her hands; after so many attacks from her, there was no other way for me to feel. Besides, her very presence always brought an atmosphere of foreboding with it.

After a while, her image gradually faded from the wall. The cold in the landing persisted for quite some time, until Cecil gently broke the silence:

'This looks like we've got the most we can out of her. I think we should go downstairs. I'd like to make another attempt to contact her.'

We went downstairs, Ann leading the way and Cecil bringing up the rear. As Ann and I entered the living room, we were amazed at the candles. For a moment, I couldn't believe my eyes. The candle flames were blowing and flickering wildly. Two of them guttered out even as we watched. There was another strange phenomenon too. A green light was flickering on the ceiling. It looked as if someone was flashing the beam of a torch around in circles.

Ann shouted, 'Cecil! Hurry up and see this!'

'You know what this means,' I said to Ann. 'She's showing her presence again.'

'I wouldn't be too sure of that, John,' said Ann as she slowly turned on the spot, her eyes fixed on one of the slowly moving globes of green light. 'These are coloured lights – this is a spirit manifestation to help us and to help the spirit that you see.'

The green globe of light was about the size of a tennis ball and it bobbed

in the air about three or four inches from the ceiling. As we watched, it slowly disappeared into the ceiling directly under the spot in the ceiling where the face had shown itself on the wall. Before it completely disappeared another globe appeared. This was a gold-coloured one, and it moved much faster, but it too entered the ceiling at the spot directly below the landing.

As we watched, doors opened and closed. They weren't being slammed. It was as if they were being moved by a strong, but firm breeze.

As Cecil hurried in from the hall and joined us, the candles were still being affected and the spectral flashlight was still on the ceiling. His face said everything.

Ann was bubbling with excitement, pointing to the light on the ceiling as it flew around and around in seemingly aimless circles.

It was the candles that worried me. I watched them anxiously, afraid that the breeze would get too strong and blow them out. The breeze felt as if it was getting stronger. I was amazed that the candles had kept alight for so long.

I said, 'Cecil, the breeze is getting stronger.'

He nodded, 'I feel that *she* is getting stronger with it.'

'We should get out while we still can,' I said. ' Get out before someone really gets hurt.'

Cecil heard me and nodded, but I knew he was fascinated by what lay in the house. He said, 'Why don't you calm down and take a seat. None of these phenomena look as if they are dangerous.'

I could hardly believe I was doing it, but I sat down. Ann put her hands on top of my head and then Cecil began to pray.

He asked God to give me peace of mind and the strength to overcome this supernatural manifestation and the will to keep on with my life.

Finally, we left the house. There was only one good thing that came out of that episode: at least I hadn't been given a hiding this time.

Outside, Cecil paused and said, 'John, put your hand on the back of my shirt.'

When I did so, I could feel that it was soaking wet. He had been under tremendous physical strain with the rest of us, but he had managed to hide it. Ann confessed that sometimes she had felt a real terror of apprehension inside the house.

As we walked, Cecil said in a resigned voice, 'I've done as much as I can. We've spent two nights in the house. I've put into effect all of the usual prescribed methods, including prayer and attempts to contact the spirit in order to communicate with it and learn its needs.'

Ann was baffled too. 'Once you make contact with the spirit, that usually means the end of the disturbance.'

'Not this time,' went on Cecil. 'She's not necessarily evil, mind. But she is certainly complex. There's a lot going on that we don't know about.

'That is why,' he concluded, 'if I were you, John, I wouldn't go back there.'

'Yes,' advised Ann. 'Stay away from it, John.'

## Chapter 13 Square One

When we returned to Margaret's house, we found Greta waiting up for us. She had been worried about us being in the house, fearful of what might transpire.

When we gave her an account of the night's events, she just sat there with her mouth open, barely able to believe it all, especially when Ann said that she too had seen the woman's image in the wall. Cecil and Ann then left, promising help in the future if we should need it, but again advising us to have nothing more to do with the house.

Before he left, however, Cecil said a strange thing to Greta. 'Some day there could be a terrible tragedy in that house. I don't want to be reading about you in the newspapers. Take my advice and stay well away from it.'

When they left, Margaret, Greta and I talked over what Cecil might have meant. We knew that he was a medium and was reputed to have psychic powers. What had he seen in the house that made him come out with such a strange prophecy?

The following day we heard from the neighbours that the house had been very noisy after we left. Bangs came from it, ringing out from upstairs and down, as if the woman was angry. It seemed that if anybody dared to disturb the woman, it took her a long time to calm down. Evidently our visit had upset the woman and she took it out on the house.

Later that day a few of the neighbours opened the front door while Greta and I looked on. Once again we witnessed the woman's poltergeist

effect on the furniture: it was all gathered together into the centre of the room, strewn every which way. Chairs were upside down, tables had been overturned, and even clothing had been scattered about the place.

No-one would venture upstairs, because I had told them of my experiences with Cecil and Ann and no-one present had their kind of inner fortitude.

Instead, we just closed the door and left the woman in black to do what she wanted.

We were now back to square one.

## Chapter 14 A Second Last Try

Next day two of the neighbours called in on Danny. They were planning to visit St Paul's to speak to a priest and they asked Greta and me to join them. They were going to ask for help with the unnatural occurrences they could hear nightly from my house, and they wanted someone from the parish to go along and help them to convince the priests that there was something to be afraid of.

I knew from my own experience that the priests themselves were terrified of this phenomenon, but I said nothing of this and agreed to go along with them on their petition.

By the time we reached the chapel, we had sorted out who was going to act as spokesman for our little group. We knocked on the door and it was answered by Fr Curran, who stood there, staring at us in surprise.

Finally, he said, 'What can I do for you?'

I explained who we were and what the problem was and asked if we could talk to him for a few minutes. When he brought us inside, he showed us a newspaper file he had kept of all the reports about the house. He said that he was interested in Greta and myself, but on the other hand, he wasn't interested in the actual house.

One of the neighbours who had come along kept pushing Fr Curran to come around and see for himself, but Fr Curran sidestepped that issue and talked of how we needed to take our case to court and fight the Housing Executive.

We tried to explain about the fears of the neighbours who had to endure the atmosphere of the house, but Fr Curran kept changing the subject. He said, 'We have to get you and your family re-housed. We'll get a file together and approach the Executive.'

The whole time he kept avoiding the real problem: these neighbours wanted either Fr Curran or some other priest to go down to the house and stand by them. They needed the security and moral support that only a man of the cloth could provide. Up until now they had faced this as best they could on their own, but with the situation dragging on and on they needed something done about it.

After a while Fr Curran asked to speak to me alone. When the others trooped out to the waiting room, I related to him all of the events that had happened to us over the last few months. Just by looking at him, I could tell that Fr Curran was frightened. He said nothing, as he listened, taking everything in. When I finished, he spoke for the first time about how he felt on the subject.

'It comes down to the fact,' he said, 'that I feel I can offer no help on the house. I don't have the strength or power to oust this thing from your lives. Evil never sleeps, and its food and drink is not our food and drink. Fr O'Donnell, I must admit, is the only priest on the local scene who would have stood any chance with this thing, which was why he was allowed to have a free hand in the matter.'

Then Fr Curran came back to the issue of our homelessness. 'While I certainly am not in a position to help you deal with whatever it is that has taken over your house, but I can certainly help you to get re-housed.'

I was disappointed, not only for myself but for my neighbours. At the same time, I had to allow that Fr Curran – for all he was a priest – was only human. He had the right to be afraid just the same as the rest of us.

Our petition came to nothing. The neighbours were very unhappy about this. Greta and I felt sorry for them because we knew the fear and frustration they were going through. Their children were too frightened to sleep, and over the whole neighbourhood lay an unnatural silence.

Meanwhile we were still living in Danny's house during the day and sleeping in Margaret's house at night. It was a terrible way to live because were weren't able to see the kids during the night. The pressure was beginning to tell on us, making us edgy and quick to argue. On one occasion while we were leaving Danny's to make the nightly trip to Margaret's house, Greta and I were almost at each other's throats. We had been bickering for most of the night, but just as we reached Margaret's house, it all came to a head. Inside, we kept it up, exchanging angry words – until suddenly I jumped up and left. I'd taken enough.

I just went out and started walking, not knowing where I was going. The truth was I had nowhere to go. I couldn't go back to Danny's, because it would only upset the kids to know that Greta and I were at loggerheads.

For almost half an hour I walked, until I looked up and realised that I had arrived outside my old front door. I just stood there for a moment, staring at the door. I was tired and cold and completely fed up.

All of a sudden, without thinking about it, I kicked the door open and stood looking in.

A neighbour passed by at that point and saw me there, indecisive, on the doorstep.

'Don't go in,' he said. 'It's been carryin' on somethin' fierce the last few nights.'

I said nothing and when he had passed on his way, I took the few steps that brought me inside. I was committed. I pushed the door closed and stood for a moment, staring into the darkness ahead of me. The house was very cold and silent.

I kept saying to myself, 'What the hell am I doing?'

I wanted to turn and leave, but something was keeping me there. I walked into the living room and sat on the arm of the chair and put my head in my hands. I was feeling desperate, disgusted at the way life had turned out for us.

Then I heard a noise. I looked up, but I couldn't see anything in the darkness. Despite that, I knew there was something in the room with me.

The room wasn't totally dark. With the lamplight filtering in from the street, I could make out the blocky shapes of the furniture, but no details.

Then, to my horror, one of the armchairs on the other side of the room started to slide along the floor. I watched with my eyes starting out of my head as the chair backed towards the wall. When it reached the wall, it couldn't go any further in that direction so it moved in another. It turned over on its side and lay there. Then the settee erupted into movement. It was flung bodily towards the fire place. Noises followed hard on the heels of this, and the temperature plummeted.

All of this happened so quickly that I didn't have time to react. I could only sit there, open-mouthed, and watch in amazement. It took a moment or two for realisation to sink through to me, but once I realised what was happening I knew I had to get out of there.

I got up and turned for the door, but before I could do more than take a step something grabbed hold of my foot. Whatever it was, it felt very strong but at least it felt like a human hand. Then another grip fastened on me, on my upper arm this time. The fingers closed like a vice, digging deep enough to draw blood.

I was caught in an awkward stance, with little in the way of leverage, but all the same I pulled with all my strength. My foot broke free, but the grip on my arm grew stronger, the blood trickling down the inside of my shirt. Then the second grip was fixed on my leg. This time it didn't squeeze. The invisible nails were tugged down my leg with a stinging sensation, gouging the skin, tearing my socks.

I shouted out for help, even though I knew that there was no-one to hear. I had a fleeting hope that maybe Greta or Ta would have followed me, but our argument has been bad this time and I had deeply hurt Greta. While I fought in the invisible grip, I knew I was trapped. I tried lashing out at my captor, swinging my arms wildly, aiming at where a body might be – but there was nothing to hit.

All I could say was 'Jesus help me! Jesus help me!'

Then I managed to break free. I got to the door, but it wouldn't open.

I turned on the handle and tugged and tugged, but it wouldn't give. Then I felt this presence behind me – it was laughing at me, sneering at my antics to get away from it.

The room was terrifyingly cold and my hair was standing up on end and I felt that my heart would burst with fear at any moment. Then the door opened and I was able to hurl myself out into the street.

As I ran off I heard the door banging shut behind me. I was too terrified to stop running. I felt that the thing was on my tail, chasing me through the darkened streets and alleys. I ran and ran, heedless, until I reached Margaret's house.

The house was in darkness with everyone in bed. I unlocked the door and raced upstairs to crash into the bedroom. There I could finally feel safe enough to stop. I sat on the end of the bed and caught my breath. My noisy entrance had wakened Greta. She stared up at my distraught appearance. I was too much out of breath to speak. All I could do was show her my bloodied arm and the scratches on my leg.

Greta sat up and said, 'What happened to you?' but before I could answer, she went on accusingly, 'You've been back in the house again, haven't you!'

I nodded, and she went on, 'Why, John? Why'd you go back?'

My only answer was a meek 'I don't know'.

Then came a torrent of feelings: 'I was angry and confused, Greta. My life is all topsy-turvey and my family is broken up and living all over the place and there's nothing I can do about it!'

I was almost crying by now as I sat down beside her on the bed. Greta could feel me shaking so she put her arm around me. Then she began to examine my arm more closely: it was badly scratched and it was still bleeding. When I showed her my leg, she was horrified.

'Oh my God,' she said. 'You're sock's all ripped.' When I took off my trousers, the full extent of the attack could be seen: my whole leg carried a series of scratch marks that were still bleeding slightly. My two shins were almost scratched to the bone, exposing raw flesh. Greta put her hands

to the side of her head and kept saying, 'Oh my God' over and over again.

Finally, she calmed down a little and said, 'What is over in that house? It must be something very evil.'

She added, 'You're going to have to go to the hospital, John. Those are open wounds and if you're not careful you'll get an infection. You don't know what it was that did this to you, it could be very dangerous.'

'There's no way I'm going to the doctors,' I said, 'and as for the hospital, I think we've both had a belly-full of hospitals to last us for a while.'

'You're going to have to go,' insisted Greta. 'There's no two ways about it.'

'For a start,' I said, 'they're going to ask me how it happened. Do I tell them and get funny looks, or do I tell them a lie and maybe not get the right treatment?'

'You'd have to tell them the truth, John,' said Greta earnestly.

'Well, I'm sick of the truth. I'm sick of people looking at me as if I'm carrying this thing about with me. You'd think I was the one possessed and not the house.'

'Well, you'll get an infection in those cuts, if you don't clean them up properly,' said Greta.

'Don't worry,' I told her wearily. 'I'll clean the cuts carefully.'

But I was too exhausted – both physically and mentally – to do it right there and then. I lay down on the bed and tried to sleep, but every time I closed my eyes I was back in the room, seeing the furniture move of its own accord, feeling the weight of the thing as it grabbed me in the darkness, enduring the pain as the nails once more tore open my flesh.

To avoid those images flashing back on me, I lay and stared at the ceiling.

I knew it had been dangerous to go back into the house on my own, but I never dreamed that this would have happened. For the first time, it had really had the opportunity to make its mark on me.

There was no way out of it – apart from a new home to live in, it would

have to be a place well away from our old home. I knew that as long as we were living anywhere near the old house, then it would always be a temptation to go back. At least, I knew that I had succumbed to the temptation tonight. It was half-stubbornness, half-disbelief that had made me go back into the house. Even after everything we had gone through, I still needed to be reminded that there was a real and malevolent entity in the house that was out for my skin. I was not easily intimidated by anyone or – certainly in this case – by any*thing*.

The following day, Greta and I went down to the house with a few friends. When Greta opened the front door, she could see that the hall was strewn with household articles and furniture. Despite the sun shining brightly outside, the house was extremely cold, and the dark atmosphere was there. Greta didn't venture into the living room, because of the presence she felt. She said that it was as if this thing was standing looking at them, just waiting for them to enter in order to terrorize them further. They didn't take up its challenge. Instead they shut the door and left it to itself.

I stayed outside during the visit. It enraged me that this thing had free range of the house and could just wait inside to pounce on anybody who was foolish enough to venture in. We were all thinking the same thing. We had all seen films or TV programmes about the supernatural, or read a book or a story about it. But this wasn't a book or a film. This was real life. It was still so unbelievable.

After that brief visit, Greta and I went up to visit the kids in Danny's house. After my adventure of last night, I wore a long sleeved jumper to hide the scratches on my arms, so that the kids wouldn't put two and two together. Despite the way we were living, we tried to shelter the children from it as much as possible. We never discussed it in front of them and we had forbidden them to even walk past the house.

We still took the kids for walks in order to keep them out from under peoples' feet. We were forced to take them on walks outside the area because they would be recognised by other kids who would then stop them

and ask them all kinds of questions. We were trying to help our kids to put this thing behind them, and then these interviews would raise the whole nightmare in their minds again.

John was still sleeping in a friend's house, with the other four all crammed in with Danny and Sandra. The pressure on Danny and Sandra was such that I had taken to searching the streets, looking for an empty house. I was so fed up that I was willing to put my foot to a door and move into the first suitable house. I was willing to take a chance as a squatter rather than endure much more of this.

To ease the burden on Danny and Sandra, various friends would invite us round on different occasions. My kids would go to bed early to give Danny and Sandra some semblance of normality.

It was on one of these visits that the subject of a new house came up. Greta and I were talking with Greta's friend Margaret Irvine and her sister. They sat open-mouthed while I once again told them of what had happened over the last month or so. Margaret's sister found it very hard to believe, but she was fascinated by the idea. Eventually, as the evening wore on, she asked if she could visit the house. I refused point-blank to go near the house, but Greta and Margaret agreed to go. I made them promise not to go into the living room.

When they made their way over to the house, I stayed where I was. They hadn't been away for more than five minutes when I could hear screaming coming from the direction of the house. After all the warnings I had given them, they had gone ahead with their foolhardy visit.

I thought, 'What in the name of God has happened?' All I could do was look out through the window into the darkness. I had no intention of going over to the house as I still hadn't healed from my last encounter.

After a few minutes, the three of them returned, all in a state of near-hysteria.

Margaret tried to explain what had happened. She said, 'I talked the other two into going in because I thought if you weren't there, John, then there wouldn't be any kind of risk. After all, everybody knows that you're

the only one who's ever seen her, and you're the only one who's ever been hurt by her.'

'Well,' I said, 'you were proved wrong, weren't you?'

Margaret looked uneasy. 'Well, when we went into the hall it all seemed so quiet. We thought everything was all right. So we decided to go into the living room. We were there for a few minutes and then I felt something grab me. It flung me to the far side of the room! All I knew was that I was standing there one minute, and then the next minute I was picked off my feet and sent flying through the air.'

Greta added, 'So, when that happened, we all made a charge for the door. We were in a panic, trying to fight past each other to get out.'

'This sounds bad,' I admitted. 'For the first time it's actually attacked someone else even though I wasn't there.'

I sat down and looked at the three of them. They were crying, in a state of near-shock, and there was nothing I could do except to say I told you so.

'I warned you not to go, didn't I? So why did you go?'

They couldn't answer. Despite my anger at the violence they'd brought down on themselves, I was more than a little relieved. This was the first time it had attacked someone else outside my presence. That meant that the thing hadn't just singled me out – it didn't have just a grudge against me.

Maybe, I thought, it was frustrated because it had no audience for its parlour tricks, so it was taking it out on anybody who came along.

The next day when Greta was more settled, I got more sense out of her. 'I didn't want to go in,' she explained. 'Margaret and her sister more or less forced me to go in.'

'Well,' I said, 'under no circumstances are you to ever go in there again.'

I put my arm around her. 'Think how I felt when I was waiting for you in the house. I heard the screams and I thought God knows what has

happened to you!'

'I shouldn't've went,' said Greta.

'I'm just glad it wasn't you that was flung across the room,' I said. 'After what you've gone through the fright might've killed you.'

I could have said more, but I didn't. I was worried about Greta. She was looking pale from the nervous toll this experience was exacting from her. And she had lost even more weight. The kids were also on my mind. I felt sorry for them because they were roaming the streets like orphans.

I knew that I was going to have to take things in hand. The family needed to be together again under one roof before there was permanent damage done. I was determined to do something positive. I considered the possibility of being re-housed in a hostel. If it meant getting the family together and off the streets, it might be a small sacrifice to pay.

Over the course of the next few weeks, we suffered on with the same routine. We kept contacting the Housing Executive trying to get a new house, but the answer was always the same: they were dealing with our request for a transfer as quickly as possible. I think they felt it was all a joke. I'm positive they were stalling to see if we would move back into the house out of frustration.

I know that what I'm about to say next may sound very strange to some people. After all that we had been put through by the thing in the house, I still had a very strong urge to move back in. I used to sit alone and almost weep with frustration, thinking of the damage that had been done to us.

There were times in my desperation that I fantasized about burning the house down – then they'd *have* to re-house us! Naturally, once I thought this over in the light of facts, I rejected this approach. The house was part of a terrace and the neighbours didn't need a fire to put a cap on all the rest of their problems. It was bad enough that they lived next door to a so-called 'haunted house'. Besides, my neighbours had always stood by Greta and me. If they hadn't helped us, we would have been truly destitute. I will never forget the goodness of these people until the day I die.

Strangely, I was to return to the house sooner than I had ever thought.

One night, Ta and I were having a drink together, and we got to talking about my situation. Ta said, 'It's annoying to think that you and yours are homeless – and all because of some woman who's wandering about your house. There has got to be a way out of this. There has got to be!'

'We've tried everything,' I said. 'We've tried a priest, a medium, a Mass said in the house, a Mass said outside the house – what have we not tried?'

'We should just go over there,' said Ta, 'and have it out with her. Once and for all.'

'I like the idea,' I said, 'but saying it is one thing and doing it is another. For a start, just the thought of going over to the house makes my scalp prickle.'

Ta drained the last of his drink and set his glass down. 'Then let's stop talking about it and let's start doing it.'

I followed after Ta, but all the while there was a voice in my head that kept saying over and over again 'Oh my God, oh my God!' Ta was confident, I was anything but. What could Ta do if this woman took it into her head to attack us? There was no way we could fight back at her.

When we got to the house, we found the whole street deserted. The people who had been saying the Rosary had given up weeks ago. I marvelled. It used to be that the little cul-de-sac we lived in was a hive of activity right up until midnight. There would always have been boys and girls out joking and laughing because the street was their rendezvous. Now it was another casualty to the thing that had taken up occupancy in my house.

Ta opened the door to the house while I was still making up my mind about entering it or not. When he went inside, it seemed worse to let him enter alone than to follow him into the darkened premises.

Inside, we went through the usual routine. We scanned the living room for supernatural activity, we listened for unusual noises from upstairs, but

there was nothing to alert us. A dead silence enveloped us. Everything about us was still. The atmosphere felt normal – it seemed almost like our house of old when we all lived here as a happy family unit.

Ta and I went into the living room, where we sat down and had a smoke. 'Let's just see,' said Ta, as he lit his cigarette, 'how long it takes for something to start.'

We sat there for a full five minutes, until we both began to feel a strangeness creeping over us. The temperature dropped – not by much, but enough to let us feel the coolness. The atmosphere was changing too. I could feel that this thing was back and about to make an appearance.

I didn't know if I should run for the door or just sit tight and hope for the best. I was praying silently by now.

Then she walked in through the open doorway and stood staring at me with her terrible, piercing eyes. She wore a strange expression on her face this time. It was a look of anger – but there was something else there as well. Somehow I knew that she meant me no harm – for the moment at least.

I was frightened by her presence but not as terrified as I normally would be. She made no move toward me, but just stood there, staring. She didn't even blink her eyes – it was just this remorseless, penetrating, constant stare.

Suddenly the door was knocked very loudly. I was so engrossed with my wordless interview with the woman that I almost jumped about two feet into the air. When I recovered from the sudden shock, I looked about, but she had gone, although the cold that usually suggested her presence was still hanging in the air.

Ta went out to answer the door. I followed hard on his heels, because I couldn't stand the thought of being alone even for the brief time it would take for Ta to see who was there.

When Ta opened the door, we found Greta there. 'I just came over,' she said as she entered, 'to make sure you were all right and that nothing was going to happen to you.' As she went into the living room, she added,

'I couldn't stand the waiting.'

Ta closed the door and we followed her in.

Greta looked about, and shivered at the cold. 'Has anything happened?'

I started to describe my latest encounter, when in walked the woman in black again. She entered in a very aggressive manner, as if she was in a stamping rage, and meant to settle things once and for all. But instead of a discussion, it was back to open fisticuffs.

As soon as she entered, she made a grab for my neck. I dodged enough, so that she only caught me by the side of the head. The contact was very brief, but her strength was such that she still sent my head bouncing off the wall. She tried to secure a better grip on me, but Ta and Greta surrounded me and protected me from her. At that, the woman vanished into thin air.

I couldn't tell where she had gone. Instead, I stood there, trembling.

Ta said, 'We'd better get you out, John,' so we all edged our way around the room, heading for the front door.

I still couldn't see anything, so it was looking as if we could make our escape. Out in the hall, we were almost at the front door. Ta moved away from me far enough to open the door – and then the woman struck.

I don't know where she came from, but I was pulled like a rag doll from between Greta and Ta and smashed against the wall. Once there, my head was grabbed and banged repeatedly off the wall. Ta managed to get the door open, but by this time I was unconscious.

Ta later told me that he shouted for help and within a minute a dozen neighbours showed to help us. Greta could only stand and scream in terror. All she could see was my body jerking, with no visible agency to account for my strange actions. She described it later as if somebody invisible was standing there, kicking at my body. Her only way to help was to climb on top of me in order to lend me some protection. Then the neighbours arrived and grabbed hold of my feet and pulled us both out into the street.

I later learned from these neighbours that although there were five or six men pulling me they found it very difficult to get me out into the street. They were fighting a force that was using my body as the rope in a grisly

tug-of-war. In fact, the only way they got me out was when they felt the resistance depart. They could feel me being released.

When they saw I was unconscious, one of the neighbours tried to find my pulse to check if I was still alive. When they couldn't find any vital signs, I was given the kiss of life.

Meanwhile Ta and Greta were explaining to those who had come to our rescue what had happened. Even as they spoke, their words were drowned out by a series of noises from upstairs in the empty house. It was as if someone was jumping up and down, banging their feet on the floorboards.

This was too much. Ta and Greta got out of the hall and slammed the door behind them. One of the women who came to rescue us, maintains that she saw the shape of a woman passing the door of the living room and going upstairs.

It wasn't long before I was brought round. I was aching all over, and my shirt looked as if it had been ripped from my back. By now, we all could hear the banging noises from upstairs, even though the door was now closed tight. It is a sound that I will never forget.

Some people ask me why I went back to the house that night. Surely I had had enough in the way of proof that this woman meant me no good.

My only answer is this: Unless you've been through the experience yourself, you never know how you'll react. I found it difficult to accept that my family were now homeless. Think about your own home for a minute. Could you just stand up and walk away from it all without giving it a second thought? I only hope that no-one else ever has to go through what I went through, but that's what it comes down to. If it was something straightforward that had made us homeless, then we could have accepted it. If our house had been burnt to the ground, or if it collapsed in an earthquake, then you have a rational explanation for why you can't go on living in it. But here was our house to all outward appearances perfectly normal and mundane. That was the hardest part to accept. It still is.

# Chapter 15 The Final Break

A few days later, Greta and I decided to finally make the break. We got the kids together, packed some clothes and went down to the Republic. I knew someone who owned a couple of mobile homes in a place called Termenfeckin, a small village out of the way of all the publicity surrounding the house. He agreed to let us have the homes for a while. I was delighted – we were going to have the whole family together for the first time in months. We even decided to take the dog along so that the kids would have their happiness complete.

We arrived about 10.30 at night, tired from our journey and the nervous exhaustion of the past few months. The kids were tremendously excited. They hadn't been together as a family for months and it felt like a holiday.

While we settled in, the kids took the ball out to a field nearby and started to kick it about. 'Thank God,' I said to Greta. 'After all they've been through, they're still just kids,'

The following morning we all got up early because we'd promised to take the kids to the beach. They were all so excited you'd think they'd never seen the sea before. It was just that we were one family again. As we walked along the country road, laughing and joking, you wouldn't have thought that we had just come through a living nightmare.

When Greta and I looked at each other, our faces showed only expressions of relief, a contentment that despite the bad times we'd come

through, we were still together. Once or twice there were times when I'd thought we were finished, but no, we'd weathered everything.

We'd lost our house, true, but as long as we were one family together, that was all that truly mattered.

The next few days were spent pleasantly. Greta and I enjoyed sitting outside our new mobile home and watching the kids at play. Their smiling faces made us proud. They couldn't have been any happier than if we'd handed them a million pounds. Greta often sat with tears in her eyes. Not tears from fear or sorrow, but tears of joy and happiness.

Despite the feeling of momentary escape, however, I was under no illusions. We couldn't stay here forever. Sooner or later we would have to return to Belfast.

That Friday I travelled up to Belfast in order to collect more money. While I was up in town, a friend I'd known for a few years called Patrick Rice got in contact with me. He said that he knew of a house that was empty and might be suitable for us. When I went along with him to have a look at the house, I decided that we could go ahead with it. Greta would have to be consulted, of course, and the kids' opinion would need to be taken into consideration as well – but it looked a very likely proposition.

I got someone to keep an eye on the house for me and promptly returned to Greta to give her the news of the house. Her reaction was mixed. She was glad that there was a possibility of somewhere of our own, but it was tempered with the idea that we would be squatters. Not only that, but we would be starting all over again – we would be going into a house with no furniture or furnishings of any kind.

The most important thing, though, was that we would finally be together again as a family. This holiday would be the beginning of our new family life.

That was what finally made up Greta's mind. If nothing else, the house would do as a stopgap measure until the Housing Executive decided whether they were going to re-house us or not.

The kids were disappointed at the way their caravan holiday had to be cut short, but after a short talk with them, they came round to our way of thinking. They knew that if we didn't take this opportunity then when the holiday finished it would be back to a life of being shared out around friends' houses. We all agreed that if we had the strength to survive the ordeal of the thing that had almost killed us, then we would be able to move into this house and rebuild from scratch.

We packed up and arranged for transport home. On the journey up, Greta was very nervous because as yet she hadn't seen the house. She was relying on my word that it would be suitable to live. I knew it was a chance but it was worth taking.

We arrived at the house and Greta's first impression was that it was great. The kids were all excited and went upstairs to look around. I lit a fire, knowing somehow that it was going to be all right. I had a strange feeling that we had passed another milestone in our nightmare.

Greta sat on the bare floor and stared into the fire. I joined her, knowing that she was frightened by what lay ahead of us. Here we were – sitting on the bare floor with not a stick of furniture – not even a cup or a spoon to our names. But through it all, at a level that communicated without the need for speech, we knew that as long as we stuck with each other we could supply the energy and the will to get through the terrible times. I was always able to put a smile on Greta's face, and she could always give me the reason to keep on fighting.

The kids joined us, coming back downstairs. They had picked out their rooms and were now disputing who would sleep where. I had to settle the arguments by telling them that, for the time being, we would all have to sleep in the same room, on the floor. Even though they knew that all our furniture was back in the old house, in the excitement of finding a new home they had momentarily forgotten this. I could tell from their faces that when this had returned to them, they were wondering what on earth we were going to do.

I took a walk around the house by myself. I needed the chance to be

on my own in order to think. Some of the kids had gone out to get in touch with their friends. It was then, when people saw that the kids were back, that they knew we had come back from the country. Before long the door was being knocked. Some people were just curious; others were concerned about us. Before we knew it, we were sitting drinking tea – a friend had given us an electric kettle and some cups. Someone else gave Greta some curtains to cover the bare windows. This turn out of goodwill gave Greta a bit of heart. She was delighted at the way people were rallying round to help us. Someone even gave us a set of bunk beds, although for the time being, the mattresses would be more use on the floor to give everybody a place to sleep.

Then Danny appeared. He brought with him a couple of chairs so that now we had something to sit on. We even got our TV back – someone had been looking after it since we had first moved out of our old house.

So here we were – we had made a start. We still had a long way to go, but neighbours and friends were behind us. This was the first chance they had been given to help us. Our more itinerant life up until now had meant that we had dropped out of sight so to speak, but now that people knew where to find us they were more than willing to help.

Greta wept at the friendship people showed us. People, she thought, who had given up on us, or who didn't care. Some even said that they would stand by us if we wanted to buy the house. That was the sort of talk at the time, much of it just excitement, but all of it was from the heart. Everybody just wanted things to return to normal for us and for days afterwards the door never stopped.

As the weeks went by, we settled in nicely. Greta was still having nightmares, true, but they weren't as bad as before. I had more or less stopped having my bad dreams, but I still kicked violently in my sleep. I wasn't aware that I was doing it, but the fear was trapped in my mind. Even when I wasn't asleep, my arm or leg would jerk suddenly. If there were visitors in the house at the time, it was embarrassing. We had a lot of visitors, because we didn't like to be left in the house alone. This was a

heritage of fear that we had to learn to live with. If I had to go out for some reason, I always made sure that Greta had someone with her. I was the same. I even kept the dog with me for company. But I was determined to fight it. The only way to beat it was to get back to normal and I was hoping that if Greta could see me relaxed, then it might give her some confidence.

## Chapter 16 A Third Last Try

Some of my family started to visit us – the first I'd seen some of them since the beginning to this nightmare. As for Greta's family, they still hadn't come near her. This angered Greta.

'You would have thought,' she sometimes said, 'that we had brought the thing with us!'

She was tempted to phone them, but she decided to wait and see just how long it would take before they would appear. I did much the same with those members of my family who stayed away, although I didn't feel comfortable with it. We were doing well considering the situation and their continued distancing of themselves made it very wearing.

Our next door neighbour, Maureen Mullan, on the other hand, a complete stranger, treated us better than did our own flesh and blood. She came in from next door to meet us and gave us some bedclothes and other articles we needed. Greta and I will never know what we would have done without her help. She knew of our circumstances, but it never put her off. Greta and Maureen have grown very close and she has become a real mother-figure to all of us. I remembered something that Fr O'Donnell had once said to me:

'If your family's fear is stronger than their love, then you are better off without them.'

This, we now found, was the case and we had to accept it. I have often wondered how they felt about it. Did we ever cross their minds – did they

ever give our plight more than a minute's thought?

Greta and I and our family had weathered a devastating crisis yet most of our family had not come to our aid. Of course, they couldn't have helped, even if they had offered, but the fact that they were prepared to offer would have meant the world to us in the way of moral support and family unity.

Greta and I were always well-respected. If anybody ever came to us with their problems – while we may not have been in a position to always help – we always tried to be supportive. What we needed now was for all of our families to come to our aid and say 'Can we help?' The boost to our morale would have been more than enough to help us put the head down and continue our battle with our problems.

I kept telling Greta, 'Everything will be all right,' but deep down I was really more worried than I wanted her to know. Greta had always had faith in me and that faith put a heavy responsibility on my shoulders.

At nights I used to worry: 'What do I do now?' I kept promising a new start, an end to the nightmare, but how could I do it? I was still nervous at facing people because we were still getting strange looks from people wherever we went – so the thought of trying to go out and look for a job was terrifying.

What was I going to do? I had a wife and five children and I felt helpless. We were squatting in a house that we had no right to be in.

Squatting was a big problem for me. The shame of it was terrible. Only a few months before I would have criticised someone for squatting, but now here I was doing it. But, what else could we do?

Our next door neighbour kept helping us in any way she could. She knew that there were some people in the street who were a bit wary of us moving in. It was the same old story. People were nervous of us in case we had brought the thing with us. Eventually, I knew, they would either forget or grow accustomed to our presence. They would learn that what was past was past and we intended to put it all behind us.

Well, the past was past, but it wasn't *all* behind us...

... because one night a knock came to the door. It was late and I was curious as to who it could be. So I opened the door.

It turned out to be a few of our old neighbours: Jim, Margaret and Sakina. I brought them in, wondering what it was that they wanted. When they came in, they sat down and started to explain. What they came out with really annoyed me.

They had come over to ask Greta and I to return to our old house. They wanted proof that the thing in my old house was no longer there. They wanted to be sure that the exorcism had worked. The area was now quiet – but it was *too* quiet. There was still a sense of fear surrounding the house. In effect, what they were saying was that it was my responsibility to prove that the thing had gone.

I could see that Greta was getting annoyed. She had been coming round to near normality and now this had to happen. I was afraid that it would set her back.

My answer to my old neighbours was no. I was adamant that we were not going to go back anywhere near to the house. I started to shout, telling them that there was no way that either Greta or I would put ourselves at risk for anyone.

A few of the kids were wakened by now and John, my eldest, made his way downstairs and pleaded for us not to go back. I tried to convince him that we wouldn't go. The kids were also coming round well and some of their fears were laid to rest, but now these people were threatening to open up the door that they feared could lead to another nightmare.

I told my old neighbours, 'I never said that the thing in the house was gone or whether it was still there. I just got fed up going through hell every time I went near it. I've sworn that I'll never go back and I mean it. If the house is empty and quiet, what more do you want? If I were you I'd leave the situation as it is. Why go back in at all? If it's still there all you're going to do is provoke it and start the panic all over again.'

They came back with: 'It's not just us who think you should get this

sorted out. You left plenty of good friends behind you and they all feel the same way. They may not have said it to your faces, but they certainly feel the same way that we do.'

Well, that was all that Greta had to hear. 'Is that right?' she snapped, jumping to her feet. 'Well, I'm not having anybody talking behind my back. I'm going over there right now!'

I tried to talk her out of it, but she was determined to go – which meant only one thing. I would have to go with her.

There was no way that I would let Greta go near that house alone. She had always stuck by me – now it was my turn to return the favour. As we put on our coats, I told the kids not to worry. I said, 'As long as I'm there, I won't let her go into the house.'

We walked over to the house, Greta still fulminating about people talking about us behind our backs. I walked alongside Jim, while Greta kept pace with Margaret and Sakina. By the sound of Greta's voice I could tell that she was getting angrier by the minute.

As we drew closer to the house, I began to get afraid. I was racking my brains to come up with ways of stopping Greta from going into the house. Nothing presented itself, so I was pretty sure that she was going to enter the house, despite what I might be able to say to her.

By the time we reached the house, I was terrified because I knew that I was going to have to go in with her. I wasn't frightened merely for my own sake, but for Greta's. She had come through so much during the last few months – and now this had to happen.

At the door, I put the key in the lock and pushed it open. In we all went. No sooner had the last person cleared the doorstep when the door slammed shut behind us. For a moment we all stood in the hall, uncertain as to what to do. When the door slammed, there had been a few screams from the others, but Greta and I just stared at each other – the nightmare was still here, still waiting to suck us in.

I tried the door, but I couldn't get it open. I can remember thinking to myself. 'What in the name of God am I doing in this house?' I thought I

had seen the end of it, and the thing that was in it.

Everybody calmed down a little when nothing else happened.

'At least,' I said, 'the coldness hasn't come in on us. Thank God!'

There were murmurs of agreement around me. I added, 'I don't see any point in going any further. We should get out now while we can.'

'It's a wasted journey, then,' said Greta.

'It was more nerves than anything else,' said one of the others.

'I know,' I said, 'that all I want to do is what I was told all those months ago and that is "Get out!".'

But they weren't listening to me. Already they had stepped out of the hall and into the living room. Greta and I joined them – we couldn't resist just one more look. The atmosphere was normal as we entered – the room was just as we had left it, with most of the furniture still there. All the same, this didn't feel like my home. It felt like a very lonely place, a place that had been empty for years.

I noticed that Greta was looking about her and wondered what was going through her mind. She used to love this house before all this happened and now she was terrified of it.

While we all looked about, some bright spark – Margaret – suggested that they should take a look upstairs. I said nothing, hoping that everybody else would have the sense to say no, but to my horror everyone else agreed. I had the choice of either going upstairs, or staying downstairs on my own.

Before I made my decision, I tried the front door again. It was still solidly shut.

'Okay,' I said, as I came back into the living room, 'since we can't get out, we may as well go upstairs. But – since it was Margaret's idea to go, I think she should go first.'

I stayed close to Greta as we followed Margaret upstairs and made sure that we stayed close to the other two. When we got to the landing, I felt my nerves really beginning to go. It was all coming back to me. The first night when the bathroom door slammed and locked me in. The lady in black as she stood before me. Of how she had tried to put her hand between

Greta and I as we prayed aloud on the landing. Most frightening of all was the moment when she threw me over the banisters and pulled me down by the ankles, banging my head on every step. I could actually see myself lying there at the bottom of the stairs with the woman standing over me.

While I experienced these flashbacks, the others talked about how the house felt, wondering aloud if the thing had really gone. They soon got their answer.

Before I could move, I saw Margaret getting pulled by the hair and being flung against the wall. She was lifted bodily and hurled down, screaming at the top of her voice. She landed heavily at the foot of the stairs.

Sakina was in hysterics, crying and shouting for help. Then she too was pulled back and punched, driving her to the top of the stairs. It happened so quickly that I couldn't tell if she was picked up and thrown or whether she just slipped and fell – whatever, she ended up with a bad fall.

As I looked down into the hall, I could see that the front door had now opened and Margaret was out in the street. Sakina joined her and started to shout into the house for Jim to come down.

Jim, like me, was afraid to move. This thing was in front of us, blocking our way to the top of the stairs. We couldn't see anything, but we knew it was there. We could feel the coldness about us and the presence of the thing convinced us that the woman was still active.

Jim suddenly grabbed hold of his head. I could tell from his movements that he was acting as if he had been punched on the head or pulled by the hair. He moaned in pain and then was suddenly pushed down the stairs. He thumped noisily down them, into the hall.

As for Greta, she wasn't hurt, but before she knew it she was standing in the hall and to this day she still can't remember getting down the stairs. She does know one thing: she didn't come down the stairs willingly or unaided.

So I was on my own at the top of the stairs. I couldn't see anything,

but I knew she was there. I wondered what she had in store for me. The landing grew even more chilly. This was the worst cold I'd yet felt. I had to make a decision. My left side felt like ice – she was very, very close.

I darted for the stairs, but didn't make it. Something had the hold of my ankle. It pulled me to the floor and away from the top of the stairs. A fear came over me that this would be the death of me. This thing had its grip on me and wouldn't let go. I shouted for help, but I knew that it wouldn't come – the others were simply terrified.

I felt a pressure on my chest. It felt as if someone was standing on me. It got so bad that I almost stopped breathing. The pain grew unbearable. Then the pressure eased just as if this thing had stepped off me.

I lay for a few seconds, my whole body frozen. I could feel a stinging sensation coming from the leg that had been grabbed.

'What,' I thought, 'in the name of God am I going to do? Do I run or do I just lie here and hope that it's finished with me?'

I thought that if I jumped up and ran it might grab me again and perhaps do me more damage. But all of a sudden I just said to myself:

'Fuck it – I'm getting out.'

I pulled myself up and tried to make it to the top of the stairs. Suddenly something hit me in the side. It felt as if it was behind me, punching away at me, but I couldn't afford to let it stop me.

When I reached the top of the stairs I was pushed from behind. It wasn't an ordinary push – it felt as if there was a running crowd behind me and I was being forced along by their momentum. I went flying up into the air only to land halfway down the stairs. When I landed the jar of it seemed to shake my whole back with its full force.

I kept on despite the pain. I reached the front door and lurched out into the street. Greta and Margaret were the only ones there. Jim and Sakina had had enough for one night and had gone home.

Greta and Margaret were speechless with fright from what had just happened. Greta had only one shoe on – she'd lost the other in the house. As far as I was concerned it was staying there.

We left Margaret home and then we made our own way home. Once there I examined my leg. It was badly scraped and had bled somewhat. Bruises had come up on my body as well. Some of them would have been from the fall on the stairs, but I could tell that most of them were from the beating I took at the hands of the thing in the house.

Greta and I nervously discussed what had happened. We had been in the house for a very short while – but in that short time five people had undergone a horrifying time.

We decided that next day we would hand in the keys to the Housing Executive. For as long as I had the keys I would be held responsible for the house, and we would always get questions about it. I also didn't want to be held responsible for anyone being hurt in the house.

# Chapter 17 Conclusions...

The following day I contacted the Housing Executive to inform them of my decision and they sent someone out to collect the keys. The person who came out explained that he would have to look at the house to make sure that there was no damage. We went over with him, but we made sure that he knew we wouldn't go in with him.

I stood out in the street while the man went into the house. He didn't look very happy about it. He came out again and remarked on the holy pictures and the bottles lying about the place – bottles, I told him, which had once been filled with holy water, dropped in a fit of terror when people ran out of the house.

He shivered in sympathy and admitted, 'Yes, there is a spooky atmosphere about the house that definitely made me feel unwelcome.'

I said, 'You don't know the half of it. But as far as I'm concerned it is nothing to do with me any more. I've had my fill of it. I only hope that nobody gets seriously hurt in it. I'd even go so far as to say that if I were you, I'd get the workmen in to block it up. Nobody is ever going to be able to settle in it.'

'Like you said,' he replied, 'it's no longer anything to do with you.'

That conversation took place nine months ago. Greta and I are still more or less homeless, still squatting in a house that does not belong to us because the Housing Executive has refused to re-house us.

We have come a long way since moving out of our old home. The scars have healed to some extent, but they're still there, a mark of what we have endured. We still have nightmares about the house. Greta can't bring herself to be alone in the house, and so long as we don't raise the subject, the children are happy enough to ignore it.

Regarding the house itself: there have been no less than four different families in the house over the past nine months. The most recent tenants lasted one night. They moved in on Monday and on Tuesday they were gone again. I don't know exactly the circumstances of their leaving, but I am glad for their sakes that they had the sense to get out.

I only wish I had been as sensible on the night when I first encountered the woman in black...

Greta and I would like to thank all of our neighbours and friends who stood by us through our ordeal. Without their staunch support we would not have coped. Thanks are also due to those members of our respective families who supported us when we really needed them.

I would like to offer an especial thank-you to Fr O'Donnell who was always there when we needed him. He helped us to keep our faith and was always there to lend us that extra bit of strength to help us from day to day when our lives very often seemed not worth living.

My children would like to thank the good neighbours who took them in and look after them. Without their help, they would have been left to wander the streets.

Paddy Rice deserves a mention. Without his help, I would never have found our present house which brought my family back together again. Thanks are also due to Maureen Mullan, our new neighbour. Without Maureen our return to a normal way of life would have been much longer and more difficult.

Our psychic medium, Cecil, deserves special mention. He did his best for us in a fraught and difficult situation. We thank him sincerely and wish him all the very best.

By way of a conclusion to this account, it seems that a round-up of all our friends is in order. Our old neighbours, Barney and Sadie still reside in the house beside our own. As far as they are concerned, everything is back to normal. Barney has called in a few times to see how we have been getting on and I'm pleased to say that his health is still holding up.

We still see Cathy as much as ever. She doesn't like to talk about the awful time we went through, but she still loves her bingo. I haven't seen Fr O'Donnell since he blessed the house we're currently living in, but he sees Cathy and he always asks after us.

Danny and Sandra have moved out of their old house and bought a home and the good news is that Sandra is expecting their second child.

Ta and Margaret are still the same as ever. Ta's still cracking his jokes and Margaret still loves to get together with Greta for a good long gossip.

Our own situation in this new house is measured on a day to day basis. We hope to eventually buy the house. We're just glad that the bad times are behind us and we hope that we never have to endure anything like it again.

## Appendix Letter to N.I.H.E.

To whom it may concern:
I have been in communication with Mr John Skillen of 91 —, BT12, with regard to the alleged disturbances experienced by him and members of his family at the above address, as a result of which, Mr Skillen has been forced to seek refuge for his family with friends and relations.

As an experienced researcher and investigator into paranormalism, over a long period of time, as well as being a member of the Society for Psychical Research (London), a scientific body whose brief is to examine alleged instances of paranormalism, I am of the opinion that the disturbances that have been experienced by Mr Skillen fall into a pattern identifiable as RSPK (Recurrent Spontaneous Psycho-Kinesis). Where RSPK occurs, the witnesses experience disturbances with natural resources (water supplies, electricity), abnormal drops in temperature, movement of objects or actual physical violence within limited locations or in geographical areas. In this particular case, a less common dimension was added – that of the visualisation by Mr Skillen of a form within the house. In the main, this kind of disturbance is due to a spontaneous release of natural PK energy, an energy which exists in large quantities in all life forms. Disturbances are more likely in locations that are inhabited by young children not having reached the age of puberty, as those children themselves are unconscious sources of PK energy. In most instances, this distressing and sometimes dangerous disturbance occurs to people with no previous history or experience of paranormalism.

It may be readily obvious that such an event can be both physically

frightening and psychologically distressing, the victims feeling helpless to cope with circumstances that are patently not amenable to logical control. It can and does have a traumatic effect on young children and my advice in most cases of this nature is to remove the family from the source of the disturbance. Sometimes when the extra sources of energy are removed, the location 'settles down' but often only after a considerable period of time. With regard to acts of physical violence being perpetrated on the victims, these can be potentially dangerous, as the bouts of energy are entirely unpredictable. It is of interest that this is the second case of this kind in Belfast in the last six months; in the previous case, the young house-owner and his family had to move out of their home, after several weeks of unpleasant attacks on them. It is my considered opinion that for his own sake, Mr Skillen should not return to 91 — because it is possible that the manifestations could take a more violent turn. Electrical malfunctioning and spontaneous outbreaks of fire could occur.

I would endeavour to assure, insofar as I understand the case, that I do not believe that the occupants are hallucinating, and by no stretch of the imagination can a disturbance of this kind be construed as a 'laughing matter'. I speak not only as a scientific observer of such instances, but with some appreciation of the dilemma of witnesses who are involved in such events. Should you require further verification, I would be happy to put you in touch with colleagues in the SPR.

I also appreciate the dilemma of any housing authority that finds itself having to make a decision on such a case, bearing in mind the urgency of the need of the families involved. I can only say that in the United Kingdom many Housing Authorities have, over the years, found themselves in a similar position, and it is gratifying to be able to say that in most cases they have dealt with the problem both speedily and sympathetically.

Mr Skillen impressed me as a person who was not seeking to sensationalise his predicament, but one who had behaved in a very quiet, sensible way, being honest enough to admit to being very badly frightened, as well as being very concerned over the well-being of his young family.

It is my belief that he deserves the fullest consideration.

I appreciate, too, that with a shortage of housing, there is a very real need that the Beechmount property does not stand idle and that within a foreseeable period of time it could be re-tenanted. Should any disturbance continue, I would be happy to offer any advice I thought helpful, in order for the house to be rendered habitable again. I know that the Skillen family are very sad at having to leave their home, and that Mrs Skillen has undergone a great deal of anxiety. I do believe, however, that it is in the best interests of this family that they should be re-housed, if at all possible.

I hope I have helped to clarify the situation a little. I can assure you that such outbreaks of RSPK are not the aberration of a sick mind, but a not uncommon manifestation of a powerful source of universal energy. The real danger lies in our ability to predict its behaviour or to control it.

*Sheila St Clair, BA, PGCE, SPR*
*22 June 1989*

# NUMBER 91

On the evening of 2 June 1989, a West Belfast family found their lives plunged into a living nightmare. The paranormal manifestation which visited itself upon John and Greta Skillen and their five children was, over the following days and weeks, to grow to such an intensity that the family were forced to flee their own home. To the terror of their experiences was added the frustration caused by the disbelief and cynicism with which their circumstances were viewed by many, including those in authority to whom they turned for assistance.

The Skillen family are now living as squatters and still suffer the psychological after-effects of their experiences. *NUMBER 91* is John Skillen's account of the dramatic and malign occurrences which turned an ordinary Belfast home into a place of terror.

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